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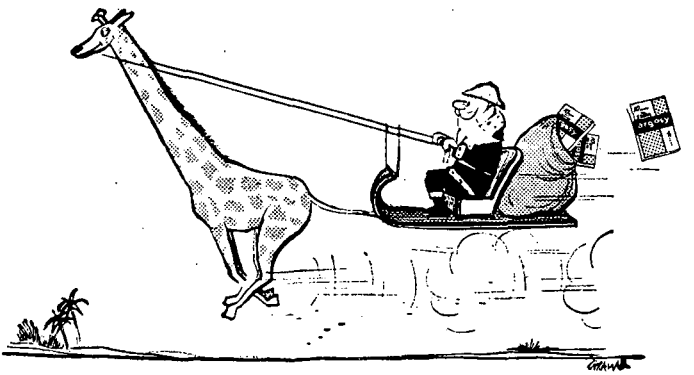

Dear old Dick and Daisy, resident in Poona
Wait and you'll wish you'd thought of it soona

Uncle Alf in Africa, Harry in Hong Kong
To reach 'em by December, don't dawdle too long

Not forgetting Thomas, somewhere in Tasmania
Don't let indecision creep up and detain ya

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argosy

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Oh, 'tis my delight on a shining night
In the season of the year!

The Lincolnshire Poacher

At five o'clock this morning the dawn was breaking red,
When I put on my shooting boots and shot right out of bed.
With pockets full of cartridges I strolled across the lea;
While I was after partridges, the Squire was after me.

Music Hall Song

" Poaching," he said, lowering his voice. " Every Saturday regular and many another night as well I'd be out, and the number of rabbits I had you wouldn't believe. And the fun I had, too—makes me laugh now to think of it. I remember one night," he said, " when I was coming home with five of them—I had one down each leg of me trousers, with their hind legs hitched round me braces, one tied round me waist inside me shirt, and one in each of me big inside pockets—and I met the policeman. A nice honourable man he was, fair to all.

" ' I suppose,' he says, ' you'll be working late tonight.'

" ' No,' I says, ' I'm on me way home.'

" ' Aren't you havin' any sport these times? ' he says.

" ' No,' I says; ' given it all up a long while back.'

" ' Ah well,' he says, ' if you should be taking a short cut across the fields on your way home and you get tripped up by a rabbit, drop it in over my gate as you go by.'

" ' Don't worry,' I says, ' I've got one on me now.' "

ROBERT GIBBINGS, *Till I End My Song*

A keeper is only a poacher turned outside in, and a poacher a keeper turned inside out.

CHARLES KINGSLEY, *The Water Babies*

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The most usual view I have of Brickett is a stern view, with his head down a hole calling to his ferret or listening for a rabbit. No matter how cold the wind he grubs among the red earth, his hands caked with it, impervious to frost, keen as an old lurcher.

He ties sacking round his knees for "kneelers," he never wears a top coat, though in really wet weather he dons a tattered "mac." His ferrets never bite him (at least so he says) because he feeds them "in the dark."

BB, *The Countryman's Bedside Book*

Poaching a Rhino!

Two men fined £120 each for poaching a white rhino. (South African Press)

I've poached a pickle paitricks when the leaves were turnin' sere,
I've poached a twa-three hares an' grouse, an' mebbe whiles a deer,
But ou, it seems an unco thing, an' jist a wee mysterious,
Hoo any mortal could contrive tae poach a rhinocerious.
I've crackit wi' the keeper, pockets packed wi' pheasants' eggs,
An' a ten-pun' saumon hangin' doun in baith my trouser legs,
But eh, I doot effects wud be a wee thing deleterious
Gin ye shuld stow intil yer breeks a brace o' rhinocerious.

G. K. MENZIES, *Poaching in Excelsis*

"Ned was half gipsy, and he was a young fellow in those days with brown eyes and a way of smiling. He walked loose and springy, like a collie dog.

"He was the best fisherman in these parts and he taught Miss Frances to cast a fly. She'd be out with him for hours and come back wet through, as often as not, and with a spot of colour in her cheeks. 'Look what Ned and I have caught for you, Mrs. Evans,' she'd say, coming in with a basket of fish . . .

"It seems that soon after—one warm evening in May when the fish were rising nicely—Ned Lovell comes to the door. 'I've come to catch a trout,' says he. 'A pretty silver one.' (He was always poetical in his way of talking.) 'Will you tell Miss Frances I've gone to the river?'

"The servant girl takes the message to Miss Frances.

"'Thank you, Clara,' says she, very quiet. And that's the last time she was ever seen or heard of in that house."

EILUNED LEWIS, *The Poacher*

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Cobwebs and Pussies

More and more rabbits appeared, more rabbits than he had seen for a long time . . .

He went home, thought about it, and finally decided to buy some nets. His father had always bought nets from a little rope and twine shop near the river wharf. The shop had been kept by a man named Booth. Bishop and Booth had transacted in a kind of crude code language: cobwebs were nets, pussies were rabbits. Luke went down to the wharf. The shop, with the name Booth painted on it, was still there, with the same odd coils of rope and jute as of old lying among out-of-date playbills in the window. It was evening and the window-gas, turned down, was burning green. Luke went in.

H. E. BATES, *The Poacher*

Oft had I heard of Canon Gloy,
And, by the Wandle Water,
Where I went poaching as a boy,
I used to gaze with secret joy
Upon his seventh daughter;
And while her father was in church,
She helped me snare the local perch . . .

Ah, me! By Wandle waters now
I roam in deepest dudgeon.
I wander lonely as a cow,
For there is none to show me how
To snare the smallest gudgeon.
I'm left with naught but eggs to poach,
A knight sans perch et sans (rep) roach!

HARRY GRAHAM, *Elsie Gloy*

My biggest Enemies—Keepers and Police—don't really worry a poacher so much as Courting Couples. They generally get into a nice corner or nook where they think they are out of all Danger of being Heard. But they forget that a Poacher may be near. If you only knew what I have Heard in the Lanes, you would laugh.

JAMES HAWKER,
A Victorian Poacher

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JOHN WYNDHAM

enslaved countless readers with "The Day of the Triffids." Here is a strange new story

it's a wise child

DR. SOLWAY folded his napkin, put it neatly beside his place, and rose from the table, leaving his wife and his assistant still seated there.

"I think I'll put in an hour or two in the lab," he announced as he left the room.

"Just—" said Helen Solway—"just as if he didn't always 'put in an hour or two' every evening."

The assistant looked at her for a moment, then, with a little shake of his head, said, "He is annoy. I think I get sack now."

Helen Solway frowned.

"Oh no, Marcel! Not as bad as that, surely?"

"But yes, I think. We have big row this afternoon. He is much—how you say?—bouleversé. Is not first time, you know, but is more serious."

"Marcel, why can't you be more tactful with him?"

The assistant shrugged.

"Is not matter for tact—is time for truth."

"You don't mean you've lost faith in his work—in his ideas?"

"Non, non." The young man's headshake was emphatic. "His ideas is good. Is proved. But zis—" he waved a comprehensive hand—"is not right milieu—set-up, now. Is too little. No good." He paused.

"Aussi," he went on, "is not good for me—for me professional, you understand. Last month the docteur read a paper to the Société. *Observations on the In'eritance of Acquired Abilities*, he call it. La matière—ze stuff—she is good. But ze manner—mon Dieu! Maladroit—not make them to understand what he say. They listen polite, but afterwards they shake the heads and laugh. 'Is Lysenko-ism,' they say. 'Why he not go to Russia? Is crackpot.'"

Marcel paused again, and shook his head sadly.

"Le docteur is *not* crackpot. Is clever man. Is great thing he

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does—very great, formidable! But he is tout à fait egoiste—you say, ver', ver' selfish. Do it 'imself. No one else. So all glory, all éclat is for him."

Mrs. Solway did not disagree with that. She said, "But I thought you said he has proved his ideas, Marcel?"

"Oh yes. Little proofs. But necessary now is big proofs—big scale tests. Such is not possible here. With big tests they take notice. Is way of commonsense.

"These things I tell 'im. 'Put your work to Société,' I say, 'to Université to make test, then you have prestige, official standing. Then they listen.' He do not like. Is not my business, he say. I say his discovery *is* my business—is every man's business. Is important, too important for small thinking. So we 'ave big row. So I think I get sack."

"Oh, I am sorry, Marcel. Perhaps he will have cooled off by tomorrow."

"Me, I am sorry, too. But I do not think he cool off zis time. He is great man, your husband—also very little man. Alors . . ." He shrugged his shoulders. "So four, five weeks perhaps, and I think I go away." He brooded for a moment, then his tone lightened.

"But now is enough of this. Let us to talk—en français, n'est-ce-pas?—of other things more interesting than sacks . . ."

Dr. Solway's "hour or two" was, as usual, more nearly four, so that it was after twelve when he came upstairs. He found his wife in bed, but still with the light on, reading. He sat down on the side of the bed, and started to unfasten his shoes.

"The children all right?" he inquired. "I thought I heard David cough as I came past."

"It's nothing," she told him. "Just the vestige of his cold. Not a peep out of them the whole evening." She considered him. "You're looking tired, Donald. You work too hard. You really ought to ease off, you know."

"I am tired," he admitted. "But it's really finished—the important part of it—now. Just a matter of checking and cross-checking results so that none of my dear colleagues can pick holes in them. What I must have is evidence that is accurate, plain, and indisputable. Something that *can't* be ignored—that, and the opportunity of a fair hearing . . ."

He sat moodily swinging his shoe on a finger hooked inside the heel.

"If only I could make a start by knocking into their thick heads what I'm talking about," he muttered more to himself than to her. "Every time I attempt a public explanation it's the

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same old story: a lot of dimwits who've not been listening to what I've been telling them dismiss the whole thing with parrot-cries of ' Lysenko! Lysenko! '—and a number of still dimmerwits rally round to congratulate me because Lysenko is a Russian, and Russians are wonderful, so he must be right; and off they launch into dissertations on the inheritance of acquired characteristics . . . And after a bit I lose my temper and shout at them, and everyone thinks it's uproariously funny, and all that happens is that they go away more convinced than ever that I'm cracked.

" They won't one day. I can promise them that. But in the meantime the result is that they're all too prejudiced to give my evidence a fair hearing—damn them! "

Helen, regarding him thoughtfully, said, " But you do have enough evidence, Donald? "

" Plenty—for a fair-minded man. The trouble is they can't clear their addled brains enough to be fair. Again and again I've explained to them that it's not acquired *characteristics* I'm concerned with—it's the inheritance of acquired *abilities*—which is utterly different, and they ought to have the wits to see it is."

" Well, to someone like me it does sound like rather a fine distinction, Donald."

" They're not supposed to be someone like you, my dear. Their job is to think about such things, professionally—only they don't.

" The difference is as wide as an ocean, Helen. Look, everyone knows that if you were to amputate a mouse's right foreleg for ten, twenty, fifty generations, its offspring still would not have acquired the characteristic of being born without a right foreleg—and never would. But compare the case of a bird that builds a particular kind of nest. Somewhere back along the line its ancestors *learnt* to build their nests like that, and the present bird builds nests that are absolutely the same in construction—nobody taught it; it *inherited* the ability which its ancestors had acquired.

" Very well, then, some species can do that—then why not others? Is it not utterly preposterous that while a spider can endow its offspring with the ability to construct such a complicated engineering proposition as a web, a man should not have the power to hand on to his son even the ability to do simple arithmetic? Of course it is. It was quite clear to me that there must be some way of inducing such a capacity.

" Look at the waste that's caused by lack of it! No conservation, or progress. Every child having to begin exactly where its parents began; generation after generation tediously having to learn its ABC and two-plus-two and cat—sat—on—the—mat over and over again, just as if no one had ever learnt it before.

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It's a nonsensical way of going on. It simply can't be more difficult to hand on the rudiments of reading, writing, and figuring than it is for a bee to hand on the complicated social knowledge required to run a hive.

" I argued that there must be a reason why in some species the capacity to hand on an acquired characteristic was very strong—even though it may have ossified later—while in others it is virtually indiscernible. Do you follow me? "

" Yes, I think so, Donald. It really amounts to asking why some kinds of creatures have very, very complex instincts, and others only the simplest, doesn't it? "

" Roughly, yes—though ' instinct ' is a treacherous word—but it is, in effect, what I asked, and what I set out to discover. Well, I admit I've not discovered the why—though I may do so yet. But on the way I did come across something else: I found the *means* of producing a result, while still not understanding the cause. And now I am able to show that it is possible, even with mammals, to induce the capacity to transmit an ability to the offspring. I can *prove* it with the results of a dozen experiments."

" I don't quite see—I mean how do you prove a thing like that? " Helen asked, with a frown.

" Well, one quite simple way was with rats. I taught a male rat and a female rat to find their way through a maze to reach their food. Just a simple maze at first, which I gradually made quite complicated. I practised them until they could find their way to the food with never a false turn or a hesitation. Then I treated both of them, and mated them.

" When the offspring were a few weeks old, I let them get hungry; then I took each in turn and set it down at the entrance to the maze. One after another they bolted through it to get the food—not one of them took a single wrong turning. They knew their way, although they'd never seen the maze before. Later on I mated two of the young ones, and *their* offspring tackled the maze first shot, just as well as their parents had. Well, you see what that means? "

His wife ignored the question to put one of her own.

" You said you ' treated ' the original two. How did you do that? "

" I doubt if you'd understand the details, my dear—and in any case they're my own secret at present, but the administration is quite simple. It can be done either by direct injection, or by introducing the agent into the diet—the latter is slightly preferable on account of the more gradual assimilation into the system. But you do see what it means, don't you? " he repeated.

" If it were to be applied to human beings, their child would

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not have to start right from the beginning like other children. He'd be born with a—a sort of built-in background. Think of the pointless drudgery that that would spare him. The rudiments, at least, of all the things we've had to learn, one generation after another, would be there already. He'd be able to read as soon as he was born—well, not quite that, but as soon as he had learnt the physical control of his eyesight—talk as soon as he could manage his tongue, and count, too. Just think where he might get to with such a flying start over his contemporaries. School over in a few years, university by the time he was nine or ten. He'd be a wonder-child . . . And in the face of evidence like that, any doubts about the transmissibility of acquired abilities would simply be swept away."

He paused, and glanced at his wife. She was regarding the open pages of her book with a curiously fixed intensity.

He went on, "One can't tell in advance, of course, to what extent actual knowledge would be transmitted. That's going to be one of the interesting things to find out. That the abilities which have become almost unconscious skills would be inherited, I have little doubt, but it might go further. It isn't impossible that he would find himself already equipped to the extent of what we consider to be average education—"

"Oh yes," his wife broke in unexpectedly, "and perhaps he'd be equipped with a taste for cigarettes, for sherry before dinner—and what about built-in political loyalties?" she suggested.

Dr. Solway blinked.

"Well, why not?" she demanded. "Have you any method of selecting what is to be transmitted from what is not?"

He frowned, a little put out.

"Possibly one would have to be careful," he admitted, "but I imagine that if, when one was under treatment, one took trouble to practise only those abilities which are desirable, and have, as I said, become almost unconscious skills—"

"You imagine!" his wife interrupted, scornfully. "Donald, you never gave a thought to the extent of the inheritance until now. Well, I can do some imagining, too—and the answer is no! Quite definitely and comprehensively, no!"

Dr. Solway blinked again.

"My dear, I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, don't pretend, Donald. Do you think after these years I don't know you well enough to see what you're working up to? It's a positively revolting suggestion. No man who had any respect for his wife would even think of it. I wonder you're not ashamed to make it."

"But, my dear, I've not made any suggestion. I only said—"

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"Oh, it might have taken you another ten minutes or so to get round to it. But it was coming. And I must say I never heard of anything more sordid and disgusting. Putting me, your own wife, on a level with your guinea-pigs and rats. Perhaps you'd like me to go into a cage in the lab, with the rest of the experimental material—"

"Now really, Helen, there's no need to take it like that. I admit I was going to ask you what you thought about it. After all, to become world-famous: the first parents of a new race of—well—geniuses wouldn't be overstating it, I should think—"

"Indeed. Well, now you know just what *I* think—and that is that it is a shameful as well as a revolting idea. Only this evening Marcel was telling me that people are saying you're a crackpot, and I must say after hearing this, I'm not surprised."

The doctor frowned. "Oh, so Marcel thinks—"

"No, he doesn't. Marcel believes in your work. He says you are a great man. Though what he'd say if he heard about this idea I don't know—at least, I do."

"Whatever *that* may mean—but since he is not likely to know about it unless you tell him, does it matter?"

"Of course it matters. How would you like it if someone you'd promised to love, honour, and obey suddenly wanted to put you in with the laboratory animals?"

"I wasn't saying that that didn't matter. It was about Marcel knowing—I mean not knowing—oh, lord, what's he got to do with it, anyway? Look, I'd no idea it would upset you like this. I thought the opportunity to take a part in the launching of a world-shaking discovery—oh well, clearly that isn't how you see it."

"It certainly isn't. I think it's the most—"

"Yes, yes, you told me that. I can't say that I understand your point of view—after all, I would be just as much in the experiment, and I'm prepared to play my part—but, of course, if the idea doesn't appeal to you, there's no more to be said."

"Doesn't appeal, indeed! There's a whole lot more I could say. Never did I think—"

"My dear, I've told you I didn't mean to upset you. I'm sorry I did. I apologise for it. The whole idea was obviously a mistake. Do you think we could agree to wash it right out, and forget about it?" He looked at her with such earnest appeal that she was somewhat mollified.

"Well, I don't know," she said. "It wasn't at all a nice suggestion to have made, not an easy thing to forget. But I suppose a man wouldn't properly understand. Now if you were a woman—"

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"If I were a woman, the proposition could scarcely have arisen," he pointed out.

"I dare say. But all the same . . ."

"But you will try to consider it all unsaid?"

"I—oh, very well, I'll do my best. But really, Donald!"

Later, when he had finished preparing for bed, and was in the act of climbing in, she said, "Marcel seems to think you are going to dismiss him."

"Marcel is perfectly right," he told her.

"Oh dear," she said. "And he is so much nicer than those oafs we had before. Is it just because you had a bit of a row this afternoon?"

"It is not. I employ Marcel to assist me—not to direct me. We've got to a point where we differ on a matter of policy. I can't keep him here if he is going to pull a different way all the time, so I shall tell him he can pack up at the end of next month. That'll give him nearly seven weeks to find something else. He'll not have any difficulty with that these days."

"It seems a pity. You've nothing against his work?"

"Certainly not. He's a good worker. He should do well—if he can bring himself to stop interfering in matters of policy which are not his concern. No, I've had enough of it. I'm giving him formal notice tomorrow—and there'll be a good reference if he wants one . . ."

The weeks went by. Dr. Solway's thought of extending his experiment from the laboratorial to the domestic field took its place with other little lapses which could be forgiven, though recorded. Marcel bestirred himself to seek other jobs, and was pleased to be accepted for one in France. Helen Solway drove him to the station on the last day of the following month.

"He was quite cheerful—no hard feelings at all," she reported. "I think he's happy at the prospect of getting home again. I doubt whether he would ever have settled properly here. He says it makes him tired trying to express himself in English—or what he thinks is English—and he doesn't like English weather, or tea, and he doesn't think English food has been suiting him, so what with one thing and another—"

She broke off as she caught a sudden expression on her husband's face. "Oh, he was quite nice about it—nothing personal. After all, a lot of people who've been brought up all their lives on one kind of food do find it difficult to get used to another. Plenty of Englishmen regard all French dishes as 'concoctions.'"

"Hm," said her husband. "All the same, it's a piece of damned impertinence for him to criticise our cook to you."

"He really didn't mean it that way, Donald. Though as a

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matter of fact, I don't think things have been quite up to her usual standard lately. I must look into it."

Dr. Solway shook his head. "I can't see any need for that. Her meals always seem perfectly good to me."

"All the same, I think just a word wouldn't come amiss."

"Better not to risk upsetting her. Cooks of any kind are pretty hard to come by nowadays."

"Harder than assistants are? No, this, at least, is my department, Donald."

"Yes, of course, my dear. It's only that cooks are so touchy."

Curiously, it was quite some little time later—a week or so, in fact, after Helen had discovered herself to be pregnant again—that an appalling thought struck her. It came from nowhere, and impinged with a vivid clarity on her half-awake mind in the small hours of one morning. A revelation-type thought: once it had struck, she knew with a positive conviction that it was right. It caused her to lift herself on one elbow, switch on the light, and thump her sleeping husband hard on the back, so that he started up, dazzled and bewildered.

"You cad!" she told him. "You dirty cheat! It's the meanest, most despicable trick I ever heard of. I'll—I'll—"

Words deserted her while her husband screwed up his eyes at her. His own temper had risen.

"How dare you do that!" he exclaimed. "It's a most dangerous thing to startle a sleeping man like—"

"How dare *I*! That's good. I suppose you're going to deny it."

"Deny what?" he inquired.

"Yes, I thought you would. Well, let me tell you it's no good. I know when you're lying, Donald."

He peered at her more closely.

"For heaven's sake! What on earth is all this about?"

"You know very well."

"But I—"

"Oh yes you do. No wonder Cook gave notice. It was you all the time. *You* were doing something to the food—'treating' it, as you called it. And of all the lowdown, repulsive, rotten, sly things to do! You knew just what I thought about your idea, and you deliberately sneaked in and did it behind my back, *and* left Cook to carry the blame."

"I never blamed anyone. I said—"

"Don't you try to justify it. I'm not listening. How dare you do your beastly experiments on me? Oh, I was never so humiliated!"

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Dr. Solway gave it up, and ceased to dissemble.

"All right, then. I did. But it wasn't just on you, it was on us—me, too. And to call it a beastly experiment is simply emotional nonsense. It is immensely important: the outcome of it may enable the whole human race to take a great leap forward."

"What do I care whether it leaps? I'm interested in me and my baby. You knew perfectly well what my feelings were, and you didn't care a damn. You just cold-bloodedly cheated . . . All right, if that's all you care about me, we've come to the end. I shall leave you. I shall get a divorce. I shall—"

"Ah!" said her husband.

She checked, suddenly.

"What do you mean, 'Ah!' like that?" she demanded.

"I was thinking of the publicity. It will be bound to arouse great interest in the results."

She glared at him.

"Well then, I probably shan't get a divorce. Though if treating one's wife like a laboratory animal isn't good grounds for divorce, there must be something very wrong with the law.

"But I shall go. I shall certainly go—and take the children with me. Who knows what you might do with them after this. I shall go this very morning. I can't bear to be in the same house with you for another day . . ."

But, somehow, with the coming of daylight and the familiar routine, the need to shake off the dust did not seem quite so urgent. There were the difficulties of knowing *where* to go, and what to do about the children's schools, and getting things packed, and not having enough ready cash available, and one thing and another which caused her to decide that next week would have to do. So she only got as far as moving herself into the spare bedroom for the few days it would take to make the arrangements.

Then what had looked like a simple, decisive action seemed to sprout complications. The matter of the coming baby presented an additional problem, making the whole thing seem too much to cope with just then, and she decided she would have to postpone it till that was over. So presently she moved herself back into the best bedroom, and banished Donald to the spare room, making it quite clear that she had no intention of forgiving him, and keeping him aware of it.

"It's the underhandedness, the disloyalty of it more than anything," she complained. "How can I ever trust you again after an unforgivable thing like that? And what sort of a marriage is it when people don't trust one another? You've simply broken up our life together by trying to cheat me into furthering your own

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career. It was a low, nasty thing to even think of doing, and I pray every night that you'll be disappointed in the end. If there's any justice, you will . . ."

In due course the baby arrived.

When Helen Solway had left for the nursing-home her misgivings—though she determinedly disguised them from her husband under a confident nonchalance—had been considerable. When he visited her there, her anxieties had already been relaxed, and when she returned home, it was in a mood of triumphant satisfaction. She lost no time at all in dimming any hopes he might still have.

"And so," she concluded. "All your silly scheming was simply wasted after all. You made all that unpleasantness for nothing. It serves you right. He's a lovely baby. I had the doctor there give him a specially careful examination, and he says he's a very fine baby, and perfectly normal in every way."

Dr. Solway looked down at the baby as she held it. He opened his mouth to reply, thought better of it, and contented himself with inspecting the small countenance closely. It looked, he found, quite disappointingly like almost any other baby.

The household settled down again, and the new baby took its place in it.

Doctor Solway's hopes had undoubtedly flickered low, but he would not let them die. He adopted a habit of visiting the baby several times a day for the purpose of studying it intently.

After a fortnight or so of this, his wife forbade the practice on the ground that it disturbed the baby and made it nervous.

"It frightens him so that he gets restless," she declared. "Just think how you'd feel if you were his size and had to look up at a great solemn face staring down at you for hours a day. It isn't fair on him."

So Dr. Solway saw less of the baby. And by degrees it somehow came about that he was scarcely seeing anything of it at all. One day it occurred to him that his wife was looking a little peaky, and that led him on to notice that she was unusually quiet, and a little distrait in manner. A slight suspicion began to take a firmer hold. He made a forthright approach.

"Just why are you keeping the baby hidden away so much now?" he inquired, covering his sudden hope with artificial calmness of manner.

"Hidden away!" she repeated. "Why, Donald, what nonsense! It's just that he's better when he's quiet. He so easily gets upset. I think he must be very sensitive."

Her husband regarded her for a moment.

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"That doesn't sound very convincing, my dear."

"Well, really! I don't think I quite understand you, Donald."

"No? Then I'd better explain, hadn't I? I rather think you don't want me to see the baby—not for more than a moment at a time. Now why could that be? Could it, perhaps, be because you don't want me to perceive certain signs that our experiment was not entirely unsuccessful after all? Could it be that?"

"Of course not, Donald. What rubbish? I told you the doctor said he was a perfectly normal—"

"Ah yes. But that was several weeks ago, my dear. Come to think of it, one was perhaps a little too eager. An unusual ability could not very well be perceptible until some means to express it had developed, could it?"

"You're talking silly nonsense, Donald. He's just a nice perfectly normal, happy little baby."

"I thought you said he was sensitive and easily upset?"

"Well, I mean he could easily be upset. It's better not to disturb him."

"All the same, I think I'll go up and take a look at him."

"I'd rather you didn't, Donald. He's just gone to sleep."

"You *are* anxious to keep me away from him. I'm sorry, my dear. It's no good standing in my way like that. I intend to see what this is all about. You come too, by all means, if you wish to."

He went past her into the hall, and started up the stairs. Helen stood for a moment clenching her hands, working them wretchedly together, then she turned and followed him with a dragging step.

Dr. Solway's imposed calmness was breaking down. Excitement surged up in him as he approached the door of the baby's nursery. Helen's reluctance had been so transparent that she might almost as well have confirmed his deductions in words. He no longer had any doubt that the experiment had not completely failed, but the extent of its success—whether it would be decisive enough to let him face his critics with his own son as living evidence in support of his theories—that was what he was about to find out . . .

His hand shook as he reached for the knob and let himself into the room.

The baby was not asleep. He was lying on his back, blue eyes very wide open, making quiet baby noises. He became aware of them as they approached the cot, and stood beside it. The blue eyes focused, and he smiled up at Dr. Solway. Then he rolled his head on his pillow so that he was looking at his mother.

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The smile widened, and then disappeared. The little lips opened and shut.

Dr. Solway was tense with excitement. He was convinced in that moment that the baby was trying to speak.

He bent closer, determined to catch anything that might sound even remotely like an attempt at a word. Helen Solway stood with her hands still clasped tightly together, an imploring look on her face.

"Ma—" said the baby, but got no further.

The tiny lips opened and shut again, as if, it seemed to Dr. Solway, working up for another try. Then the mouth pursed. The baby's blue eyes looked up yearningly at his mother. Then the lips opened once more. The articulation was not sharp, for lack of teeth, but he spoke, the words were quite clear:

"*Maman*," said the baby, "*j'ai faim.*"

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WITS ON THEIR TOES

Ten minutes to wait for a bus or a train, limber up your mental muscles on our batch of quiz questions—one a minute is good going. Solutions are on page 100.

1. *What is the difference between a placebo and a gazebo?*

2. *Who were a. Capability Brown b. Calamity Jane and c. When was the War of Jenkins' Ear?*

3. *Which Queen of France later, at her own request, became Duchess of Suffolk?*

4. *In these two sentences are buried two of London's most important buildings. Can you excavate them?*
   a. A lamp shines out for thee b. Win me best by tears

5. *What painters are associated with*
   a. ballerinas b. cornfields
   c. melting pocket watches
   d. street scenes in northern towns
   e. sad startled lions in ferny forests?

6. *What notable criminal of fiction died at the Reichenbach Falls?*

7. *Who created a. Anna of the Five Towns*
   b. Anna Livia Plurabelle c. Anna Karenina and d. Who said, "Will not the string be very indigestible, Anna Maria?"

8. *When was the term "The Ashes" first used?*

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OPHIR QUEEN

Her dark-fringed eyes came on Bruce—
the red, red lips smiled ever so fleetingly

BY VERNE ATHANAS

OF COURSE," said Levi the Tailor, " I can give you a five-dollar suit right off the shelf, if it is vhat you vant."

Bruce Harper fingered the bolt of material. " No," he said. " But my heavens, Levi, sixteen dollars! "

Levi the Tailor shrugged. " For the Prasdent United States," he said, " I couldn't cut it a nickel. Like iron, this material. Your son, someday he is going to vear this suit. This suit vill make you tall, make you straight. You von't look like some mine mucker, you vill look like the marshal."

Bruce Harper was already tall and straight, and he had no son, and he wasn't the marshal but the night marshal, as Levi the Tailor knew full well. He was a little sleepy now at ten in the morning after having gone on duty at midnight. He said, " I haven't got the money just now anyway, Levi."

Said Levi promptly, " I trust you. Turn around."

Levi measured. He hummed. He jotted down figures. He said, " In two days vill be the fitting. In two days more maybe the suit is ready. So come in two days and do nut be telling Levi the Tailor how he should make the suit."

" In four days," said Bruce, " it will be payday."

" Imagine! " marvelled Levi. "A coincidence! "

" Imagine," echoed Bruce. He left the shop.

Up the street John P. Ballard was approaching, escorting two women. One was obviously Mrs. Elsie Queen. The other obviously was not. Bruce spoke as they met.

John P. Ballard nodded. Mrs. Queen smiled. She said in her brisk and cheerful way, " Good morning, Bruce. I don't think you've met Glory. Mr. Bruce Harper . . . Miss Glory Fajen."

Miss Fajen raised eyes black as night and gave Bruce a look. Somewhere in his interior a small stallion neighed and cantered vigorously up his spine. He snatched off his hat and said, " I'm certainly glad to meet you, Miss Fajen! "

Her hair was black—crow's-wing black—and her brows and her eyes and the long lashes framing them. Her skin was white—

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oh, very white. And her lips were red—deep red, tongue-moistened red—and they parted in a demure murmur, "Mr. Harper." A man could warm his hands at that voice, as at a small brisk fire.

John P. nodded again and escorted the women past. Bruce put his hat on. The small stallion nickered and pranced to and fro in his head. "Oh, hush now," said Bruce, and went on his tour through the town.

Ophir was a straggle of shacks and slab houses and tents hanging precariously on the side of the mountain, menaced from above by the dump of the Red Ophir Mine works and rapidly filling the gulch below with its own dump of bottles and cans and the general detritus of some three thousand hard-living souls. Ophir was rough and tough and rich and proud of it.

Bruce returned to the office. John P. Ballard was not yet there. Bruce resignedly kicked the chair away from the desk and sat down and yawned.

He thought about Miss Glory Fajen for a while, his eyes closed and his lips faintly smiling. A big fat horsefly came yammering through the open door and droned to a landing on the nose of one Juan Ortega who had killed several people, if the WANTED poster could be trusted.

Bruce drew his revolver and aimed carefully at the fly. Mr. Ortega was worth quite a bit of money, quick or dead. On the other hand, Mr. Ortega was reputed to be fast with a gun; so it was just as well that it was only his printed image which stared fixedly past the fly on his nose. Bruce reholstered his weapon, sighed, and yawned again.

In due time John P. Ballard made his appearance. Mr. John P. Ballard was, in a phrase of the day, a living legend. In younger days, before John P. himself wore the star, it was said that no less personage than Wild Bill Hickok had once left town for three days to avoid a meeting. One J. Wesley Hardin, it was said, came up the trail from Texas, witnessed a shooting match wherein John P. picked off four running rabbits twenty-five to fifty long paces distant, following which Mr. Hardin quietly rode back to Texas.

His moustache had gone grey and his double-breasted waistcoats showed a prosperous broadening, but when he laid a cold eye on an incipient causer of trouble, said trouble became downright conspicuous in its haste to be gone. Bruce Harper knew he walked in the shadow of the legendary John P., but there were times when it was a comforting shadow—say about three o'clock in the morning, with trouble abrewing along Whisky Row.

Bruce stood in the door and rocked on his boot heels. "A—ah—fine-looking young lady, Miss Fajen," he said.

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John P. Ballard selected a cheroot from the box in his drawer and tucked it in under his grey moustache.

" Hm-m."

"Ah—just arrived, I imagine?"

" Mm-m."

Bruce cut a surreptitious look at John P., who regarded the end of his cheroot. " She is going to play piano in the Ophir Queen," said John P. quietly.

" Oh."

There was a short silence, and then John P. said, " Miss Cassiday will probably have your supper ready. Go along if you like."

" Sure," said Bruce.

He went upstreet and turned right to the house of Colin Cassiday, and came upon Colin himself just leaving, returning to his work as shift boss at the Red Ophir.

" Now," said Colin, " a man can wait till his dinner's cold and then eat it anyway because he can wait no longer, and then the sweet dallier comes in his own good time. Dammit, man, ye'll ruin me stomach yet!"

" Sorry," said Bruce. " Got held up."

" Now, Papa," said Jenny, coming out the door. She was a lovely creature, Jenny Cassiday, provided a man's taste ran to redhaired and blue-eyed colleens built as trim and solid as a little brick cottage.

Said Colin, " Dinner's done and over. I've got to get to me work. Let him eat at the Chinaman's."

" Oh, Papa, run along," said Jenny, kissing the tip of her forefinger and patting it on the tip of her father's nose.

" Well, mind you leave the door open. I won't have the neighbours talkin'. And when he's fed, he can go."

Colin departed, muttering about a man who'd not hold a decent man's job nor work a decent man's hours, and Jenny preceded Bruce into the kitchen. He made a small strategic manœuvre of trapping her between the sink and the table, and got his knuckles rapped with a wooden spoon.

He sat at the table and nursed his knuckles and wondered aloud, " Now what's got our Jenny so uproarious?"

" Because I say not, and that's what."

" Why," he said soulfully, "it's not as if—I mean, we do sort of have an understanding."

She turned a keen blue eye on him. " And an odd bit of a thing it is, too, how much better the understanding is *between* Father Doolin's visits."

He carefully rearranged knives and forks. " Why," he said,

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" I've got—obligations around. And you know your father is always and for ever lecturing about how a man's got to be able to—support a—well, you know—"

" I know," said Jenny. " Here's your supper, or whatever it is in the middle of the day."

He reached to catch her hand and got the spoon again. " Don't be mad, Jenny. There's nothing to get mad about."

" Why, no," she said, vigorously pumping a pan of water at the sink. " Me father fights off every man comes calling with a stick for fear he'll poison himself with his own cooking, and when one does get past him, *he* has his obligations and his excuses, and mind you, now—" setting the pan to heat with such spirit that water sloshed and hissed on the hot stove—" mind you, y'll feed one another one of these days, and we'll see which poisons which!"

" Now, Jenny, what is it? What's the matter? "

" Why, no matter at all. If you think so much is the matter, why don't you go and see if that black-eyed pussycat won't feed you! "

Bruce sat a moment, mouth agape. "Ah-ho! " he said finally.

"Ah-ho, indeed! I saw you watching her swinging that—that bustle full of—of—*hay*! "

" Why," said Bruce judiciously, " it didn't look like hay to me."

"And you looked close enough, too, didn't you? Well, why don't you feed your gluttonous self, so you can run back down there and have another look? "

Bruce, feeling somewhat put upon, said, " By George, I will! " Which he did, not even looking round when Jenny banged the door; a hearty hunger pang reminded him he hadn't even sampled his supper, and it was still four days till payday.

The night deskman roused him at eleven, and he got up and washed and shaved by the light of the wall lamp and cut himself and swore softly. He went dourly up the street to the Chinaman's for breakfast—ham and boiled potatoes sliced and fried. The coffee was awful.

He checked into the office at midnight precisely. John P. wasn't there. He debated hooking one of John P.'s cheroots from the desk drawer, decided against it, and stopped in at the Ore Bucket and ran half a dozen stogies on his bill, bit and lighted one.

He got as far as the Ophir Queen before he saw John P. Ballard standing at the bar, a thumb hooked in his waistcoat, listening as Miss Glory Fajen played a grand piano at the far end of the room.

Miss Fajen wore a gown as black and shiny as her hair, a great

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swirl of skirt supporting her slender waist, and none too far into the northern latitudes the black gown left off and the white skin began. As her dark-fringed eyes came on Bruce they acknowledged his presence and the red, red lips smiled ever so fleetingly. He felt the quick rataplan of small cold-shod hoofs galloping up his spine. Hoo, boy, he told himself. Steady—steady.

At his elbow John P. Ballard's dry voice said, " I think I will call it a night, Mr. Harper."

" Fine," said Bruce absently. " I guess I can handle it all right, now."

" Of course. You might check a couple of the other places—at your convenience, of course."

" Oh. Yes. Sure."

He checked the other places. It was nearly two o'clock before he got back to the Ophir Queen, and to his disappointment Miss Fajen was not in evidence, and the grand piano had been covered for the night.

Bruce went on his rounds . . .

On Thursday he had his fitting, and on Saturday he collected his salary, paid Levi the Tailor, gave the bootmaker ten on account, paid his tab at the Ore Bucket and a couple of other accounts, and paid the Chinaman and then the Chinaman's cousin who did the laundry, and retrieved his shirts. He tunnelled into the best one, with the pleated front, rubbed up the nugget cuff links and wished he had a gold chain to swing across the front of the waistcoat like John P., and whipped a high shine on his boots with dubbing and a soft cloth. He sallied forth, fragrant with bay rum.

Even John P. was impressed. " Fine suit," he said. " Excellent fit." He brought his gold watch out and popped it open. " Just a little early tonight? Only nine o'clock."

Bruce prinked his lapels into a faultless roll. " Oh," he said casually, " I just thought—Saturday night and all—might sort of look around a little before I went on."

" Certainly. Got your pay all right? "

"Ah—yes, yes, this morning." He rocked forward on his toes and back to his heels and clinked the coins in his pocket, a half dollar, his lucky silver dollar, and a quarter eagle, all the money he had in the world, excepting the half dime and three copper pennies in the stud box in his room.

John P. lighted up one of his cheroots, shoved the box across the desk. "Join me," he said.

Said Bruce, astounded, " Why—thank you, sir." He selected one, lighted it, and inhaled the implausibly fragrant smoke. He exhaled audibly.

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John P. said abruptly, " I haven't seen you going up the hill for your meals lately."

" No," said Bruce stiffly.

" Mm-m. Cigar all right? "

" Fine—fine! Best I ever had."

" You never make a mistake with the best. No one but a fool buys shoddy." He puffed his cheroot, looked up keenly. " Well, run along. Have your fun. I'll see you at midnight."

Bruce went into the street, walked past the Ore Bucket and Bloody Bill's and the Oro Fino and the Square Deal. Here and there men spoke to him, and he nodded in reply.

He stopped in at the Ophir Queen, but the cover was still on the grand piano, and Miss Fajen was nowhere in sight. He saw Mrs. Elsie Queen briefly as the door to the far room was opened and closed; Elsie big and high-coloured and handsome in one of the rich gowns she always wore.

Bruce speculated a moment about her and John P. One seldom saw them together during business hours; yet John P. was her escort, openly and without apology, on many a daylight excursion; he was the only one in the whole of Ophir who came and went through either the inner or outer door to the far room at his own apparent convenience.

It was common gossip that John P. was a partner in the Ophir Queen, though he never publicly showed any more proprietary interest in the place than any other. Bruce tucked the thought away in his mind as he went out.

At the Mercantile Mart Mr. Pottinger was closing up; out on his wide porch Jenny Cassiday was standing, two big tow sacks of groceries beside her, looking helplessly downstreet. Obviously her father had left her to do her week's shopping and had gone off for a glass or two with the boys, and time had slipped along on him.

" Hullo, Jenny," said Bruce.

" Oh. Bruce." There was a short silence.

" Maybe I could—give you a hand—carrying these things? "

" Oh, I'm sure you have other things to do. Papa will be along soon."

" Why, I haven't anything else to do right now, Jenny."

" Oh? I understand you are being kept awfully busy down at the—the—Ophir Queen, isn't it? "

"Ah," he said softly, bleakly. " You—understand this? "

" Oh," she said, " Papa tells me how busy you've been and all. And I knew you must be awfully busy, not ever coming round."

" Well, now," he said with some heat, " I wasn't so sure I was welcome around any more."

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" Nor I'm not so domned sure meself," said Colin, coming out of the dark. He looked Bruce up and down. " Trapped out like a trick horse," he said. " Spend yer days sleepin' an' yer nights prowlin' an' yer money on frippery . . . Come along, girl."

Bruce kept his eyes on Jenny. Jenny looked almost wistfully back. Then at Colin's peremptory voice she followed, and Bruce stalked back towards the brightness and uproar of Saturday night and payday on Whisky Row. He turned in at the Ophir Queen deliberately, knowing Jenny and Colin could see him from the store, if they had by chance dallied this long.

Miss Glory Fajen sat at her grand piano playing something quiet and tinkly, the sound almost lost in the exuberance of Saturday night. Bruce stood a moment before deciding she wasn't going to look his way just now, and went to the bar.

Technically he wasn't on duty yet. He ordered a drink. He looked round. His eyes slid across one face, came back, and he idly thought of a big black horsefly, and then quite suddenly he saw the poster on the office wall. Here, in all-too-solid flesh, was the much-wanted Mr. Juan Ortega.

Bruce had three thoughts in flashing succession. He wished he was clean away from here. He wished that John P. Ballard stood at his elbow. He hoped he was going to get away with this. He moved clear of the bar and within jumping distance of Mr. Ortega.

The door to Mrs. Queen's far room opened, and John P. Ballard stepped through. Mr. Ortega, turning from the bar, casually reached down for the pistol at his thigh. Bruce made a lunging dive, embraced Mr. Ortega with wide-flung arms, drove him back against the bar and nearly got his foot shot off for his trouble. It did not seem possible that Mr. Ortega could have drawn so casually and yet so rapidly, but he had, and though the bullet blasted into the floor a good half inch from Bruce's left foot, he found himself in roughly the same spot as the man who caught the bear by the tail. He needed help to let go.

Mr. Ortega kneed him swiftly in groin, belly, and chest, and simultaneously writhed, twisted, and wrenched. Bruce hung on desperately. Then came a thud from overhead, and Mr. Ortega collapsed atop of him.

Bruce disentangled himself. John P. Ballard holstered his pistol. Mr. Ortega lay on the floor, with his hat caved in and a matted streak across his coarse black hair.

" Well," said John P. meditatively, " I imagine we'd better take him over to the gaol."

Mr. Ortega had a slender knife in his back pocket, a jackknife

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in his right front pocket, a single-shot Colt .41 derringer in his left front pocket, the usual assortment of matches and tobacco and papers, plus ninety-eight dollars in gold and one dollar seventy-five cents in silver.

" Nice round sum," said John P.

" He had a drink in front of him at the bar," said Bruce. " Prob'ly he had two. That'd be two bits."

"And he was cocked and primed and waiting for me," said John P. Ballard. He swiped his moustache right and left with a forefinger. " Might have saved a lot of trouble all round if you had just shot him."

" Wasn't time," said Bruce.

John P. regarded him steadily, then reached out and touched him on the shoulder. " I'm grateful," he said quietly. " Thank you."

"Ah, hell," Bruce said, " it wasn't nothin'."

" Possibly not," said John P. dryly, " but keep an eye on him for a while, will you? I want to check his back trail a bit."

A few minutes after John P. Ballard had left the office, Juan Ortega rolled his head to and fro, heaved a heavy sigh or two, then blinked his eyes and surveyed his surroundings. He sat up on the gaol bunk and stared malevolently at Bruce through the bars. After a while he felt the small of his back gently, as if for a sudden pain.

" We got the knife," observed Bruce. " You can stop feeling for it."

Mr. Ortega spat on the floor. Bruce smiled. Mr. Ortega pulled an invisible Indian blanket about his shoulders and sat hunched on the bunk, looking glumly at the floor.

Bruce looked up alertly, then stood up quickly in a pleasant confusion as Miss Glory Fajen stepped in the door. She wore a trailing scarf of black net about her bare shoulders. Her face was almost anxious, but when she saw Bruce, she smiled with incredible brilliance.

" Oh," she breathed, " you *are* all right."

" Why, sure," said Bruce, as pleasant confusion turned to blissful confusion. " Sure, I'm all right."

She placed a delicate hand on the expanse of white above the gown. " I was so frightened," she said. Then her face stiffened. Her heels clacked on the floor as she swept imperiously across the room to the barred door.

" Oh! " she said in outrage. " You! Of all the ——" Mr. Ortega stared at her with dull-eyed insolence.

" You," she said. " Stand up. Come over here. I want to see the face of a man who'd do such a thing."

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Mr. Ortega got up. He slouched towards the front of the cell.

Bruce said warningly, " Miss Fajen, I wouldn't stand so . . ." But she stood, looking Mr. Ortega in the eye with the utmost contempt, and then she stepped aside as Bruce came up behind her, and Mr. Ortega said his first words.

He said, " Unlock this damn door." He held a short heavy-barrelled revolver squarely on Bruce's belly.

" Give me that gun," said Bruce without conviction.

" You bet! Now, I don' wanna shoot you, but I'm gonna if you don' move! You unlock this door right now, you dumb cochino, or I'm gonna blow your head right off! "

There was enthusiastic conviction in his voice. Bruce unlocked the cell.

" Turn round," said Mr. Ortega.

Bruce turned round. Then the entire gaol roof fell on him.

He sneezed vigorously, and was surprised to find himself flat on his face on the dusty floor. He pried himself up, and a good-sized iron ball rolled from one side of his skull to the other, and stopped just over his left ear with a terrible thump. Bracing a hand to keep the floor level, he looked blearily round.

He sneezed again. His head was full of dust, and that confounded iron ball kept rolling to and fro and banging up the inside of his head. His nice new sixteen-dollar suit was a mess. His revolver was gone. His prisoner was gone. Miss Fajen was gone. He closed his eyes and wished thickly the whole blasted thing would just go away. It didn't.

He got to his feet and went at a stumble and stomp to the gun rack and fetched down one of the heavy double guns, shoved a brass-cased load of double-aught in each chamber and closed the breech. Then he went forth in search of Mr. Ortega.

He was perhaps halfway up the street when the fireworks began in the alley behind Whisky Row. There were two shots, one almost atop the other, a pause, and a third shot, by which time Bruce had ducked between two buildings and was running in that narrow passage, with the ball in his head ricocheting off every inner cranny of his skull.

He burst into the alleyway and saw John P. Ballard prone in the dirt and Juan Ortega prowling towards him, left hand clutching his bloodied side, his revolver thrust at a stark rigid angle towards John P. At the sound of Bruce's running, Ortega wheeled and fired and missed, and in the next instant the battering ram of massed buckshot caught and lifted and dumped him messily against the side of the Ophir Queen.

Bruce knelt by John P.'s body, feeling an odd and poignant sense of loss. Gently he touched, feeling for a pulse, and

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incredibly John P. Ballard stirred and with great effort tried to lift himself. Bruce caught him and eased him over, and to the first of the cautious investigators approaching he shouted, " Get the doctor, and get him now! "

John P. Ballard looked up at him palely and said, " Twice in one night is too damned many. I am going to quit this business." Then John P. grinned faintly and lapsed into unconsciousness.

The doctor came and looked, pursed his lips, and said, " Maybe; " and they took John P. away.

Bruce picked up his shotgun and walked to the alley door of the Ophir Queen. It was locked. He lifted a leg and kicked it open, hearing the clatter of the broken lock on the floor inside.

He stepped through quickly and said quietly, " I never shot a woman, but I can if I have to. Put it on the table, honey, right where I can see it."

The two women froze; Mrs. Queen as always, big and warm and handsome in a rich red gown; Miss Glory Fajen still in black, the scarf floating about her white shoulders, the wicked stub-barrelled derringer half raised in her hand. She looked into the muzzles of the shotgun and carefully put the vicious little gun on the table.

" Well, then," said Bruce, kicking the door closed. He looked at Mrs. Queen and felt sick. " Wasn't your share enough? " he asked.

She looked old suddenly—old and dumpy and sag-jowled. She said thickly, " You don't know anything about it."

" Enough, maybe," he said. " You were partners, weren't you, you and John? And half of this wasn't enough. You had to have it all." He looked at Miss Fajen. "And you came in on it just because you owned Ortega." He shook his head wonderingly. " Now your fighting dog is dead; where does that leave you? " The pale Miss Fajen went even paler with shock. " Why," said Bruce bitterly, " did you honestly think he was man enough to kill John P. Ballard—even from behind? " He looked at Mrs. Queen.

He said almost gently, " Elsie, you're a fool. How long do you think you'd have lasted if this pair had killed John? "

She said, " I can take care of myself."

" Like a rabbit between two wolves," he said unpityingly. He broke the shotgun, set the empty case alongside the derringer and closed the gun with one live round still chambered. " I don't want to tell John," he said. " Nor do I want the pair of you fouling my gaol. I'll be back at daylight. Don't let me find you." He pulled the trigger, and both women started at the snap of the pin in the empty chamber.

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Mrs. Queen said thickly, "And I'm just supposed to walk off and leave all this?"

"Why," said Bruce, frowning judiciously down at the shotgun, "that seems reasonable enough to me—doesn't it to you?"

She sagged into a chair, looking sick.

Miss Fajen said throatily, "Bruce—"

He looked at her. She moved subtly inside the black dress. She looked at him through thick black lashes, and her red lips smiled, as enticing as Eve's apple. "Bruce," she said, "we can work out a better thing than that, you and I. You're smart enough, Bruce, to—"

"Smart enough to know better than that," he said. "Yesterday, maybe, but not today. What I said was daylight. What I meant was both of you." Then he scooped up the derringer, left the empty shell standing on the table as he walked out of the room.

He came out on to the main drag, ablaze with flares and lanterns all along the noisy street. Through the street's dust, dodging the Saturday-night revellers, someone was running. He recognised her and went towards her, and Jenny ran straight into his arms, and she clung to him and wept a little and gasped, "Oh, Bruce, I heard the shooting, and I was afraid it was you, and I came down the hill and somebody said it was the marshal, and I thought it was— Oh, Bruce!"

She stopped to kiss him with great vigour, and he kissed her back, and what with one thing and another quite a little crowd began to gather before they broke apart.

Jenny blushed bright red and clung to his arm and buried her face in his chest as he grinned and waved the shotgun and said to the gathering, "Go along, go along—haven't you got any business of your own to tend to?"

He took Jenny under his arm and pushed through, and as they came past a naphtha flare she looked up, her face half weeping, half laughing with relief, and he kissed her gently, and she said, "Oh, your suit—your beautiful new suit. You come right along and let me sponge it before that blood dries and ruins it."

"It's all right," he said.

"It is not. I mean it is. It's a lovely suit—it's a beautiful new suit, and I wanted to tell you so before, but—"

He grinned and tucked her arm a bit more securely under his own.

"Why," he said happily, "it's like John P. Ballard always says—you never go wrong picking the best."

They walked up the hill together, leaving the Saturday-night uproar of Ophir behind them.

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For the price of one

By W. H. BOORE

CAN two live for the price of one? " and that sort of thing we talked about first time we met, which was going it somewhat for a chapel outing with tea and biscuits and homemade buns.

" Homemade," said George, " cheaper than boughten, far: very sensible indeed. Taking out shop overheads—rates and assistants' wages, advertisements and lighting—I shouldn't be surprised if homemade isn't less than half the price of shop stuff."

" You might be right at that," said I. " Have a cigarette."

" Don't smoke," said George; " it's a very wasteful habit, and I am surprised at so sensible a girl spending money on such things, Miss Jones."

" Call me Elizabeth," I said, " it will save a word."

But he did not notice my irony, which was very upsetting, being that I had always been proud of the sting in my tongue; more fool me, perhaps, because it had not got me a boy, not a regular. However, as I say, he did not notice the irony on account of having second thoughts about smoking as between those who give and those who take.

" Perhaps I will have a smoke after all," he said, " since you are so pressing."

He turned a pale green shortly afterwards and was, I believe, only kept from being sick by fear of splashing his trousers, with dry-cleaning the price it is.

He took me home afterwards, pointing out how much healthier it was to walk than to go by bus, and growing quite enthusiastic when I told him how far away I lived in terms of return fares; although he grew quieter somewhat when I was telling him how hard the streets were on shoe-leather, animals having lost the

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knack of growing hides except from cardboard. "Even bulls are getting thin-skinned," said I, "and if you talk much more about the cost of my smoking habits, I, too, might begin to feel the point of it."

So he switched the subject right away to what his landlady charged him for bed and breakfast and a mite of supper, and we were back again at whether two could live for the price of one. It occurred to me then, suddenly, that romance could insinuate itself through the meanest of chinks. And, anyway, George asked me to meet him again the following night, which was surprising, for I was not a good one with the boys ever; pretty enough, but never knowing how to deal with them, somehow. Perhaps George's particular conversational trends were so different from what most girls talked about that I started off equal, if you see what I mean.

"Perhaps we'll go to the cinema," said George as we said goodnight. He kissed me at the door, too; a careful kiss; top lip to top lip and lower to lower, touching in the middle only with no surplus of contact or energy, but what there was of it seemed good, somehow; and I took cheese for supper to save opening a tin.

We met again the following evening as arranged, George turning up dead on time and me ten minutes late. I know he was dead on time, because I was watching from round the corner; and I joined him ten minutes later because every girl, even me, has her pride. George pointed out that he could have spent that ten minutes on further studies for his trade examinations. But I pointed out that he had enjoyed ten minutes of the pleasures of anticipation, and what better could he want. George was kind enough to agree that perhaps he could put the period down on the credit side after all, and I was most unreasonably encouraged thereby.

George had said that perhaps we would go to the cinema; but he had only said "perhaps," so I suppose I had nothing to grumble about, really. And, after all, I had now gone out regular with the same boy every night—for two nights.

As George explained, the programme only lasted for two and a half hours—he had been studying the time card in the cinema show window. "Last week it was three hours," said he, "and I would not like to see you swindled out of sixteen and two-thirds per cent of your entertainment."

"It's a great film," said I.

"But short value," said he.

In the event, we walked again; but I became slowly glad that we walked together. We seemed to walk softly, somehow, as if

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we were both feeling our way forward; and if the unworthy idea did cross my mind that George was being easy on the feet on account of what I had said the previous night about shoe-leather, I soon dismissed it; because, after starting off swinging our arms independently, we worked up to arm in arm and finally George graduated to arm around waist and I to head upon shoulder.

In fact, we became intimate enough for George to talk about his bank account, into which he was making regular deposits against whatever might happen—and the way he squeezed my waist as he said it suggested that it might be beginning to happen already. Regular deposits he was making although, as far as I could gather, he never drew anything except breath.

"Who's this boy you're going out with all the time?" my mother asked me when I reached home that night—when I reached home walked, embraced, and kissed with never a penny spent on me. "Who's this boy you're going out with all the time?"

So even my mother had noticed I had held on to him for twenty-four hours. "A newcomer to the chapel," I said; "and what's more, I'm seeing him again the night after tomorrow. He's working overtime tomorrow, so of course I'm out."

"What's he like?" asked she.

"Quiet," said I, "quiet; rather shy, I think; only talks about one thing, and that's not what you'd think. He doesn't really know how to treat a girl—in fact, he doesn't know how to treat."

"The serious ones are sometimes the best," said my mother.

"He'd probably make jokes if he could sell them," said I rather bitterly.

"Where's he live?" asked my mother.

"He's lodging near the observatory," said I; "in fact I believe he must be the original Greenwich mean."

"Do you like him?" she asked.

"He goes in for the cheap but not gaudy," I replied, "so I suppose I suit. Anyway, I never was very clever with boys, so we run about level, I suppose."

"I asked," said my mother, "I asked whether you liked him."

"I—I think I do," said I.

The next evening—the evening after going out with George and the evening before going out with George again—I went for a short walk. I walked alone; it was funny how I felt the draught from the outside of the pavement. I walked alone—and whom should I meet but George.

"I came along," said he, "on the off-chance I might see you."

"But I thought," said I, "that you were working overtime."

"I was going to," said he.

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"At double rates for after hours," said I.

George winced. "I know," said he.

"Well—well, didn't you want to work overtime?" I asked.

George swallowed hard. "I didn't want to," said he, "I didn't want to as much as I wanted not to."

I thought that over and decided that I understood—that I most gladly understood.

"And," said George—he talked as though he were having a tooth pulled out—"and I've been thinking—we'll go to the cinema after all."

It was at that moment that I rose to my greatest heights. The evening had turned cold; the cinema would be warm; and I said, "No, no, George. You have already sacrificed your overtime; I don't want you to spend what you haven't earned."

And he believed me, which shows that love is blind, after all.

But he insisted on taking me to a little self-service place for coffee, and he would have bought me a cake if I had not persuaded him not to be reckless. It did not taste at all bad, that coffee; in fact, as far as I remember, it did not taste at all. It was strange how, seated at a little round table, we could build an unseen wall round ourselves just by looking at each other. And George held my left hand, so I could not have eaten that cake after all, however much I might have wanted to.

The coffee had cost George sixpence and three hours at six shillings an hour. Eighteen and six for a cup of coffee—I found it full value at the time because of what it cost, which is crazy economics, as I was to find out later. For, sad to say, George never quite digested that coffee; it lay, a lump, against the wallet in his breast pocket; it lay there for more than a week. George walked me much, as though distance covered could be translated into bus-fares and cinema seats saved, so that by the Saturday of the following week George might have been considered to have made a profit by sheer mileage.

It congealed about us, that coffee. Poor George; I realised how through lack of overtime he suffered non-payment into his account that week. But he kept with me; he clung on somehow, despite the hollow ache in his pocket. And as the following week was nearing its end, I began to hope—not more than hope and not much of that—to hope that George was recovering from the orgy of one coffee and the abandon of three unearning hours. I hoped; but I also doubted.

Then, on that second Saturday, we went on a picnic; free air, and seats for nothing on grass; air so free and grass so spacious; hours so bright and—for one must mention it—food so cheap

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and mostly provided by me; except for the biscuits. George brought the biscuits; a pre-packed roll of them, containing twelve. We reckoned we had enough tea in the flask for two cups each—it was a big flask; and we could, therefore, have a light repast of tea and biscuits when we reached the country, and the rest of the tea and food later.

"We'll have three biscuits each now," said George; "that will leave us the same quantity for teatime."

George, at last, seemed to have shed his humours. He looked happy and—and generous. And generous, I thought, he could remain, as long as I did not ask him to be.

Now George had eaten his three biscuits; I had eaten two of mine. While George was digging my third and last from the packet—something of a difficult job because modern packs are made to contain but not to give up—I strolled to a nearby gate and leaned over it looking at a wide world; a world that was wide, however meagrely one partook of it. And I was wishing for some sign of grace from George, some little break for freedom from the cruel prison of his own nature. Only a little break, I thought, scarce more than a sign; nothing so lavish as a cup of coffee or a remitted overtime. Only a little breakaway, I thought—and then it came.

George had counted the biscuits carefully by feeling up the side of the packet; three each now, and three each for tea; what one might call a balanced outlook—but I did not call it so. And I happened to glance over my shoulder as George carefully abstracted the last of my ration and laid it with even greater care on my plastic plate. He put it there as though he liked putting it there—for me; or so I was thinking wishfully; and he stowed away the remaining biscuits with the air of a man who has accomplished something precise, minute, and infinitely precious.

And then, as he turned, he happened to knock my biscuit on to the grass—grass with which the farm animals had, as it were, been familiar. George surveyed the soiled article of food; I watched the hunted expression that came into his face at this destruction of his nutritional balance-sheet. I averted my gaze as he looked round furtively. Then I watched him pick up the biscuit, and scrape it clean with his pocket-knife; then he replaced it on my plate.

A cracked world swam in my tears. Oh, George, I thought, poor, silly little, miserly little George, how could you? But I waited for a moment, more to recover myself than anything else. And as I waited, George brooded over the refurbished article of food. Then, slowly, very slowly, he took it in his hand and put it in his pocket; he took another biscuit from the packet for me.

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At any rate, I thought, summing up the day's proceedings in biscuits, he has gone so far as to expend a packet of biscuits on me—well, half on me, anyway. Now, who could he love so little as to save a dirtied biscuit on?

I had never before seen thoughts come out and crawl, dragging the tips of hot mean fingers with them. After a moment of indecision, he fiddled in his pocket again; I could see the movement of his hand as his fingers touched and broke the thing in his pocket; and I saw them come out and begin to carry to his mouth a piece of the biscuit, not good enough for me but too good to waste. Somehow I understood how George was being small in a big sort of way; turning his meanness upon himself for love of me: this would be altruism in a nobler soul—generosity's other side.

How niggardly, how petty, how filthy, and how—how kind; in a moment of enlightenment I knew that one more wrench at that strained, sad trait of his might snap it altogether.

"George," I called, "oh, George, you daft loon. Give it to the birds; give it, I say, give."

George looked up at me; looked at me with eyes that saw his own reflection crouched in mine. For a moment he seemed—he seemed almost frightened, and I began to think my expression needed adjustment. I did my best, but he was a long time coming round. A friendly smile, a touch of admonishment without malice, a hint that I had done the same sort of thing myself often—it was a bit of a strain keeping that lot on my face while he wondered how to take it.

And then he started to grin—in a small way at first somewhere round the eyes, but spreading like light until his face was as wide as a field. "Caught out," he said, "caught out properly; and I—I—I think it was about time, too."

We went home by bus. "After all, why not?" asked George—but he sighed as he asked it, and took the fare out of his pocket bravely. After he had paid it, and found himself still in one piece, he went even further; he took my left hand in his, and studied carefully its third finger—ring finger—engagement ring finger. I could almost feel him gathering himself for the plunge.

"Rubies," he said at length, "unusual perhaps, but necessary."

"And why?" asked I.

"Rubies," said George, "symbolic, if you see what I mean; blood out of a stone, what?"

We were quiet for a while after that, as the bus moved jerkily from heaven to heaven. "I wonder," said George suddenly, "how many can live for the price of one?"

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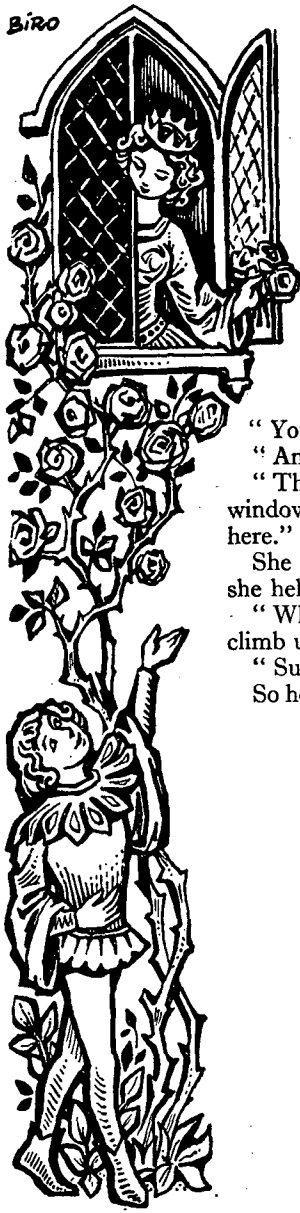

Lattice Salad

And I a maid at your window...
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

"You are Melisande?"
"And you are Florizel?"
"There are many roses round your window," said he to her, "and none down here."

She threw him one of three white roses she held in her hand. Then he said—

"White rose trees are strong. May I climb up to you?"

"Surely," said the Princess.

So he climbed up to the window.

E. NESBIT, *Nine Unlikely Tales*

Rapunzel, Rapunzel

Lean out of the window,
Golden hair,
I hear you singing
A merry air.

I have left my books:
I have left my room:
For I heard you singing
Through the gloom.

Singing and singing
A merry air.
Lean out of the window,
Golden hair.

JAMES JOYCE, *Chamber Music*

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Window Witch

I was one night sitting at the great drawing-room window, lost in the melancholy reveries of night, and in admiration of the moon-lighted scene . . .

On a sudden, on the grass before me, stood an odd figure—a very tall woman in grey draperies, nearly white under the moon, courtesying extraordinarily low, and rather fantastically. I stared in something like horror upon the large and rather hollow features which I did not know, smiling very unpleasantly upon me; and the moment it was plain that I saw her, the grey woman began gabbling and cackling shrilly—I could not distinctly hear *what* through the window—and gesticulating oddly with her long hands and arms.

I flew to the fireplace and rang the bell frantically, then flew out of the door and met Branston the butler in the lobby.

"There's a woman at the window!" I gasped. "Turn her away, please."

With an air of authority he approached the window and demanded rather sternly, "What ye doin' there, woman?"

Her answer, which occupied a little time, was inaudible to me . . .

"Please'm, she says she's the governess."

J. Sheridan Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas*

Window Box

Hibiscus was red
(It grew by my window),
And salvia,
Poinsettia,
The spikes of aloes,
And the Kaffirbloom
In flaring splendour.

Here there are flowers . . .
Daffodils, primroses, daisies,
Fritillaries, buttercups,
But nowhere in England
That pagan colour,
Nowhere that red
That flamed by my window.

Charles Ould, *In Exile*

Shaft of Light

The priest was still incapable of speech. His terror of Sir Daniel, his terror of perjury, risen to about an equal height, strangled him.

And just then, through the high stained-glass window of the hall, a black arrow crashed and struck, and stuck quivering in the midst of the long table.

Robert Louis Stevenson. *The Black Arrow*

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" Won't you look out of your window, Mrs. Gill ? "
Quoth the Fairy, nidding, nodding in the garden;
" Can't you look out of your window, Mrs. Gill ? "
Quoth the Fairy laughing softly in the garden;
But the air was still, the cherry-boughs were still,
And the ivy-tod beneath the empty sill,
And never from her window looked out Mrs. Gill
On the Fairy shrilly mocking in the garden . . .

WALTER DE LA MARE, *The Mocking Fairy*

Ghosts through the Glass

She climbed the low wall, and walked softly by the yew trees up to the house until she stood in the shadow, close to the first of the three windows, and stood there a long time, afraid to look in. Her fear was not of being seen but of what she might see. There was no breath of sound from within. At last she looked in, looking down at the floor.

It was a huge room, and very dark. For a little way on the dark floor the moonlight lay in three paths from the three French windows, and just at the end of the centre path, it shone on a very small pair of green and silver shoes. Jan looked at them and wished there were nothing else to be seen in the room but those tiny, gleaming shoes.

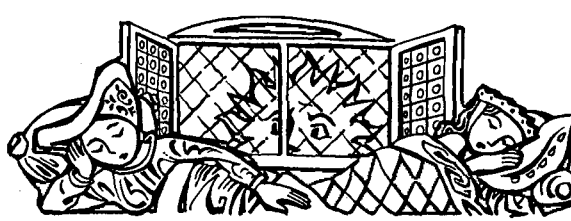
Then she looked up and saw that the shoes belonged to a figure that sat in the shadow. The figure of a man stood in the shadow between the shaded candle and the moonlight. He was behind the seated figure and was as motionless as she . . .

She ran most of the way home, and all the time she was telling herself, " I'm real—real—It was those others that were ghosts."

MARGARET IRWIN, *Still She Wished for Company*

See the clear sun, the world's bright eye
In at our window peeping;
Lo, how he blusheth to espy
Us idle wenches sleeping.

Madrigal



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THE OTHER HAND

Out in the street, the whine of a saw made me turn and stop dead

BY GEORGE LANGELAAN

DOCTOR, can you please cut off my right hand?"

Looking over the rim of my glasses at the slim, athletic man sitting the other side of my desk, and meeting for a second his steady gaze, in which I could read both fear and determination, I picked up a blank index card.

"Your name, please, monsieur?"

"Manoque. Here is my card—Jean-Claude Manoque."

"Age?"

"Thirty-two."

"Address?"

At each question, I glanced at him. Well dressed, at his ease in spite of his request, softly spoken, he seemed a man of the world, and his address showed that he must be quite wealthy. His eyes, however, betrayed his nervousness; he explained that he had not consulted any other doctor but that he had come to me because I was a surgeon and happened to live near by.

"Show me your hand, please, Monsieur Manoque."

Leaning forward, he pushed it palm-up over my desk. It was the strong, well-shaped hand of a man of action, with long, square-tipped, robust fingers. At the base of the thumb and on the edge of the palm, just below the little finger, were two callouses which I touched with the tip of my finger.

"Tennis," he explained with a smile.

Turning the hand over, I looked at the neatly-manicured nails, and pressed my thumb here and there over the tendons and veins on the back of his sunburnt hand where a slight growth of hair from the wrist down to the fingers denoted strength and one or two old scars on the knuckles could have been proof of a certain aggressiveness.

"Your other hand, please."

His hands were much alike; the only perceptible difference was that his right hand shook slightly.

"Thank you, Monsieur Manoque. Now will you please explain?"

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" Is an explanation necessary? "

" I'm afraid so. What is the matter with your hand? "

" It is no longer mine, Doctor," he said slowly, looking me straight in the eyes.

" I see; and whose is it? " I asked, drawing a sheet of note-paper towards me and beginning to write. Years of experience had taught me never to show surprise or so much as smile at anything a patient said.

" I don't know and I don't care, but I want to get rid of it."

" Monsieur Manoque, I am afraid I can do nothing for you, but here is the address of one of my colleagues who I am sure can help you."

" A psychiatrist, I suppose. Thank you, Doctor, but what I need is a surgeon. I'm sorry I bothered you," he added, standing up, " but, of course, I should have known. I suppose I shall have to manage some other way."

" This is the address of a psychiatrist, Monsieur Manoque, but you are mistaken if you think he cannot help you. I strongly advise you to see this man."

" Thank you, no. I'll come back to see you, though," he said, bowing slightly and moving towards the door.

" I shall not be able to see you, monsieur."

" Oh, I hope you will."

My assistant showed him out, and as I waited for my next patient to be ushered in I looked at the card I had just filled in, hesitated a moment, then tore it up and dropped it into the wastepaper-basket.

Trying not to smile, I was examining a collection of X-ray photos of the stomach of the perfectly healthy wife of a famous art dealer, who was convinced that she should be operated on for an imaginary ulcer, when my assistant knocked and opened the door—a thing she never does.

" Excuse me, a very urgent case," she muttered.

" Well, what is it? " I asked, going to the door and closing it.

" That young man, just now. He is in the surgery . . ."

" Do you mean to say he is still here? "

" He left, but he's back . . . He's had an accident."

" An accident? "

" His hand, Doctor . . ."

The young man moaned and came to as I was doing some tricky sewing on the end of his maimed wrist.

" There," I said five minutes later, lighting a cigarette and sticking it into his mouth as my assistant gave him a double shot of morphia. " The ambulance will be here in a minute."

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Born of English parents one Sunday morning in Paris, George Langelaan was educated on both sides of the Channel, speaks French like a native, English like a Londoner, and rightly regards both countries as home. He collects experiences as others collect stamps—as a reporter in the States, a wartime cloak and dagger parachutist with the Resistance, foreign correspondent and roving journalist and writer all over the world.

His stories—remember "The Fly" in Argosy ?—are written with an almost clinical observation of detail, curiously interwoven with fantasy and the macabre.

At present living in Paris, he is earnestly engaged in writing to keep his charming French wife, a little car, and a parrot called Pancho, in the manner to which they are accustomed.

" Thanks," he said, puffing at the cigarette. " Now I suppose you want to know—"

" No, not now. I'll see you later, at the clinic."

" Just as you like," he said, smiling. " Oh, by the way, I thought you or the police or someone might want it, so—so I picked it up. It is in the left pocket of my coat."

" What is, Monsieur Manoque? "

" My hand, of course," he drawled, blinking as the morphia was beginning to act.

That evening, I had a visit from the local Commissaire who told me how the cabinet-maker round the corner of my street had seen Monsieur Manoque enter his shop, go straight to the back where one of his employees was cutting chair legs, lean over him, and hold his wrist against the whizzing saw-blade.

" The cabinet-maker is certain he did it deliberately, but his employee is not so sure. Did he say anything to you about it, Doctor? "

" Only that, should the police want to see his hand, he had picked it up and put it in his coat-pocket. It is there in that tray if you want it."

" No, thank you, Doctor."

I hesitated, but finally decided against mentioning Monsieur Manoque's earlier visit; even if he was mad, he had confided in me of his own free will, and I felt I had no right to reveal his secret.

At the clinic the next morning, I met the Commissaire coming out of my patient's room. Monsieur Manoque had apparently

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assured him that it was a deplorable accident due to his foolishness and that the cabinet-maker was in no way to blame.

" It was very good of you not to have told the police about my first visit yesterday, Doctor," he said, as I examined the chart at the foot of his bed. " Otherwise, I suppose they would have had me certified."

" I never discuss the ailments of my patients, Monsieur Manoque."

" I suppose you still think I could do with a psychiatrist? "

" Of that I am sure."

" But supposing there was an explanation, Doctor? "

" There is always an explanation."

" Yes. Would you like to hear mine? "

" In a few days' time, when you are well enough to come to my consulting-room. And, if you don't mind, I have a friend who would be interested—a doctor, of course."

" Trying to help me in spite of myself? " he said, with a broad smile. " All right, but your friend will surely find me a queer customer."

" Why should he? "

" Because I happen not to be insane."

" Yes, of course . . ."

His bandaged arm still in a sling, perhaps a little thinner, but smiling, Monsieur Manoque came into my room a week later and I introduced him to my colleague and friend, Professor Boucot.

" Monsieur Manoque, I do not want you to feel in any way obliged to discuss your affairs, or even to give any sort of explanation. However, if you still want to, and only if you want to, I think that Professor Boucot can probably help you. And, of course, if you wish, I can leave you alone with him."

" No, Doctor, it is only fair that you should know the whole story."

" One more question, Monsieur Manoque. Would you mind very much if I switch on this tape-recorder? "

" It will not be used against me in any way? "

" That I can promise," I assured him.

" Switch on, then, Doctor."

Here is Jean-Claude Manoque's story, as I myself typed it from my tape-recording later:

It really started the day I picked up my brother-in-law's gold lighter and slipped it into my pocket. Once or twice before that, however, I had noticed that my right hand shook slightly and felt very hot, but it was only later that I remembered this

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detail. Even on the day when I picked up Ludovic's lighter, I did not take much notice. I was worried, of course, and had no sooner left the room than I rushed back, put the lighter down in front of him, and apologised. Ludo did not take much notice either, it seemed. He merely laughed and said that he also had a knack of picking up other people's pens and then felt foolish when he discovered them in his pocket later on.

What worried me, though, was that it had not been accidental. I tried to reason it out; I am not a thief or a kleptomaniac. It was not a joke, either, nor was it to tease Ludo; I never tease people and, in any case, Ludo is not the sort of person one teases.

It was only later, a good deal later, when other things happened, that I suddenly realised that it was not me, but my hand, that was acting with my knowledge, yet quite independently of my will. It was then also that I noticed the connection between these strange actions of my hand and the heat and trembling that preceded them.

For instance, when walking down the Champs Elysées with my wife and Ludo one evening, I did a most outrageous thing, and the very fact that my wife was there proves that though it was my hand, it was certainly not my will!

Suzon was walking between us, and so that she could hold my arm she had given me her fashion magazine which I had rolled up in my right hand. Walking ahead of us were two girls of a type that for some mysterious reason tourists consider typically Parisian but who, of course, are not. You know, the sort of girl who is just a little too well dressed, with heels two centimetres too high, skirts two centimetres too short, a little too tight round hips that swing just a little too much. Ludo grinned at me and winked, and I grinned back, and Suzon shrugged her shoulders as we swung out to pass them. As we did so, I raised the rolled-up magazine in my hand and brought it down with a resounding smack on the plumpest part of the girl nearest me!

I was far more dumbfounded and shocked than the girl, who turned, white with rage, and was evidently going to slap my face when her companion dragged her away, saying, "Can't you see he is drunk?"

I said nothing and Suzon did not speak to me for two whole days.

A week later, something else happened. Ludo had come to pick me up for lunch, after which we were to drive out to the Racing Club for some tennis. As we were walking out of the little restaurant where I usually lunch, my hand deliberately picked a hat off a stand and put it on my head. It was a horrid

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green velvet hat, a good size too small, and although I was terrified that its owner would come running after me, I walked slowly out with it on top of my head! It was only once I had reached the street, and Ludo had stopped dead and stared at me, that I was able to tear it off with my left hand, run back into the restaurant, and hang it up where I had found it.

No one seemed to pay any attention and I did not have to use the lame excuse that I had mistaken it for mine. It was the only excuse I could think up, and when I told my brother-in-law he was kind enough to pretend to believe me and to laugh heartily.

"But, Jean-Claude, you must be colour-blind! Suzon would drop dead if she saw you with a thing like that on your head," he joked.

As we were driving back from the Racing Club in the Bois de Boulogne, a few hours later, my hand again felt hot and started shaking. I stiffened, ready to react, but felt somewhat reassured; nothing much could happen, since we were alone in my car. I therefore waited for an urge or a desire to do something which I was confident I would easily and immediately repress.

The only thing within reach seemed to be Ludo's handkerchief —unless of course the urge proved to be a more devilish one, perhaps to pull his tie or his nose.

I slowed down as a nurse wheeled her pram across the road ahead of us. She had almost reached the kerb when my hand pulled the wheel down, and not only was I unable to react, but I had no desire to do so! It seemed only much later—a bare fraction of a second really—that I tried, in vain, to pull the wheel back with my left hand. Just as we were gathering speed and heading straight for the nurse, now up on the pavement, I managed to stamp down on the brake and stall the car.

"Nom de Dieu!" I gasped.

"What's wrong?" queried Ludo. "For a second I thought you were trying to run that girl down."

"A—a sort of cramp in my hand," I lied.

"First you hit them with a rolled-up magazine, then you go at them with your car. Next thing you know, you will be driving through level-crossing gates," chuckled Ludo, as I pulled up in the underground garage of our house.

Luckily Suzon had some friends in and Ludo did not mention the hat or the car incident. With a word of excuse, I left them to their tea, cakes, and cards, and went into my study where I have my books, a desk, and some comfortable armchairs that don't look like torture instruments of the next war.

"Jean-Claude, have you any cigarettes?" asked Ludo, coming in uninvited.

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" In the right-hand drawer of my desk over there, mon vieux," I said, pretending to be reading a letter.

" I say! That's some piece of artillery, isn't it? "

" Yes, a souvenir of the Resistance. It is an American Colt .45 automatic."

" Is it loaded? "

" Yes; leave it alone."

" Ready to shoot? "

" Well, the safety-catch is on."

" That thing there? "

" Yes," I said, a little annoyed, getting up and going over to the desk to pick up the gun to put it away.

" How does it work? Tell me."

" Never mind," I said, as my thumb flicked up the safety-catch and, swinging the gun round towards Suzon's head, which I could see through the glass-panelled door, I squeezed the trigger!

Nothing happened; the trigger did not budge. I sat down, feeling sick and dizzy. Had the gun been cocked, I should have blown my wife's brains out, for there was a shell in the chamber.

" Jean-Claude, what in—what made you do that? " stammered Ludo, white as a sheet. " You knew it wasn't loaded, but still you frightened me, you know."

" It is loaded—or rather, it was," I snapped, pulling out the clip and throwing out the live shell with a flick of my wrist.

" Why didn't it go off, then? "

" Because it wasn't cocked and that was something my hand didn't know! "

" Didn't know! What are you talking about? Jean-Claude, are—are you all right? I mean . . ."

" Yes, I'm all right now," I said, throwing the empty gun into the drawer and putting away the clip and loose shell. " At least that won't happen again."

It seemed that this time my hand had not shaken or given me any warning. That night, as I lay awake, I again shuddered at the thought that, had the gun been cocked, I should have killed my wife. Trying to explain that my hand was no longer mine, that it had also tried to run down a nurse in the street, would not have got me very far with the police and nowhere with a jury.

Turning on the light, I looked at my hand, touched it, clasped it with the other hand. Yes, it was mine all right, and coordinating perfectly with the other; yet, when it acted strangely, it was as though some other hand had got into it, and possessed it. What I could not understand, however, was why I remained so passive, just as though I were watching another person. My left hand somehow never reacted till too late. Had my left hand

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really tried to straighten out the car when my right hand had pulled it in towards the nurse with her pram? It was difficult to say. My foot had, thank goodness, stamped on the brake pedal in time.

Though I could not explain it, there were times when my right hand was no longer really mine, but I knew that telling anyone about it would be quite useless. A doctor, it was evident, would have diagnosed some form of schizophrenia, a typical case of split and even opposing personalities. Therefore, before going to see a doctor—or the police, who would inevitably call in a doctor—I would have to be able to prove that the hand was not mine.

That proof I had the next day.

At the office, I was jotting down a telephone number when it suddenly occurred to me that, whereas I always do my sixes downwards and very straight, I was starting with the loop and doing them upwards, with curved tails. Fascinated, I sat at my desk and tried scribbling a few words on a pad. As I did so, my hand went hot and began to tremble, and I found myself holding my pen in a totally different way, across my second finger with much more slant than usual, and the writing was no longer mine but that of another! Amazed, I drew a sheet of paper towards me and let my hand write. With a strange detachment, I watched it writing quite fast, faster than I can usually write.

Perhaps the strangest thing of all, the one thing that showed I was not my own master but a mere machine, was that I did not know what my hand was about to write. I read the words as they appeared on the paper, one by one, letter by letter, as though I were watching over some other person's shoulder. The hand, which was certainly that of another at that particular moment, stopped in mid-sentence, and became mine again. In front of me were some fifteen lines, evidently written by someone who had seen a play, but a play I had never heard of! Was there such a play? I wondered, opening my paper and looking for the film and theatre page.

There was, and the leading article was a criticism of it! The critic had been rather harder on the actors than the one who had used my hand, but there was no possible mistake, it was about the same play. I read the handwritten text over and over and, on a hunch, sent the office boy out to get me all the morning papers. I was right; the fourth paper I opened—one I never read—contained, word for word, the text my hand had written and copied!

Again I thought of going round to the nearest police station;

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but no, it was no use. I could imagine myself trying to explain that I had someone else's hand, or that someone else was using my hand. Then I remembered Suzon's friend, the graphologist who worked for the police. Finding her telephone number was quite easy. Could she kindly give me her opinion on a half page of handwriting? Yes, it was important.

"Why do you want a report on this handwriting, Monsieur Manoque?" she asked an hour later, frowning.

"It is the writing of a person who applied for a job this morning, and—and—"

"And you do not like him, for this is the writing of a man . . . and you are quite right. It is the writing of a bad and perhaps even a dangerous man; the writing of a very determined man who will hesitate at nothing to reach his ends, but with, it would seem, a marked preference for stealth and cruelty. It is one of the most unpleasant handwritings I have ever come across."

"That just about sums up my feelings about—about him. Thank you very much indeed."

Outside, as I fumbled for the key of my car, I saw a small leather wallet in the gutter. I picked it up. It was a cheque-book belonging to a certain Monsieur Ch. Ralingue, and since the cheques were payable at the Crédit Lyonnais branch office off the Avenue Victor-Hugo, which was on my way home, I slipped it into my pocket and drove off.

Suzon was out when I got home, and as I took off my coat I remembered the cheque-book. I hesitated, then decided that I would drop it in at the bank on my way to work next morning, but, so as not to forget, I put it on my desk. As I turned, my hand felt hot and heavy. It was still burning and shaking as I sat down and let it grab my fountain pen, unscrew the cap, open the cheque-book, and tear out a cheque.

It seemed to hesitate, then slowly, but in a bold handwriting which I had never seen before, wrote out a cheque for ten thousand new francs to my order. It dated the cheque, then with a slow flourish very carefully and laboriously it signed the name of Ralingue. By the time my fountain pen had been put back in my pocket the ink on the cheque was dry; the hand folded it, took out my wallet, and put it carefully away.

The surprising thing is that I left it there. I did not react afterwards, and I had the horrid feeling that the hand was beginning to get the better of me. It was not merely the hand but also the arm that was no longer mine. Another thing that made me shudder but which I could do nothing about was that my left hand, though still mine, was now coordinating with the mysterious right hand. I had used both hands to put the cheque

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in my wallet. Of course, I could do nothing with such a cheque, but the mere fact that I had written it out and put it away was terrifying.

When I walked into the Crédit Lyonnais branch office the next morning, my mind was made up: I would simply hand in the cheque-book and say nothing about the cheque I had torn out. However, instead of taking it out of my pocket, I went to the paying teller, opened my wallet, drew out the forged cheque, turned it over, calmly endorsed it in my own handwriting, and pushed it across the desk together with my driving licence. With barely a glance at me, the cashier noted the number of my licence and passed the cheque to someone behind him.

I waited calmly as though I had handed one of my own cheques into my own bank, and when my name was called I quietly stepped up to collect. Ten thousand new francs is quite a sum, and I had to stuff three of my pockets with the notes.

No sooner did I get outside than I felt sick and faint. My hand, *the* hand, had forged Monsieur Ralingue's signature so well that his cheque had been cashed with the greatest of ease!

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Suzon, surprised at seeing me back home. "Oh, Jean-Claude! You look ill. Shall I call the doctor?"

"No, thank you. I'll be all right."

That afternoon I went back to the bank and paid into Monsieur Ralingue's account the ten thousand new francs. The cheque-book I had torn into pieces and dropped down a drain.

From then on, however, my life was hell. I wrote more and more, sometimes in my own writing but often in that of others. I turned out quite a few love-letters addressed to my wife, which my hand signed André. Mind, I was not jealous of Suzon; I never have been, and I am quite sure that she has never had an affair with any other man. But this automatic letter writing, as was every action of the hand, was quite unrelated to any of my desires or emotions. Perhaps more agonising than the actual writing of the letters was the fact that, even when I was not under the influence of the hand, I was quite unable to destroy them. Yes, I was fully conscious of the danger they represented, and I wanted to get rid of them, but there was a will stronger than mine, a will that had a reason, a plan.

As time passed and I began to suspect what I was being driven to, I reacted less and less, and the more obvious things became, the less I was able to resist.

The night when the hand made me write to my brother-in-law, explaining that I was going to kill Suzon because she had a lover, I made a desperate effort to break free. First, I tried

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running away. I left the house all right, but returned shortly after my beastly hand had posted the letter to Ludo. Then, as in a dream, I went to the drawer where my pistol was and, like a spectator watching a film, I saw my hand loading it and noticed with horror and dismay that my left hand was helping.

Twice I managed to bring the gun up to my own head but, each time, as though made of iron and weighing a thousand kilos; my right hand pulled it down. Desperate, I tried to grasp the pistol in my left hand and I might have succeeded had Suzon not suddenly rushed in and swept the gun off my desk.

"Jean-Claude, chéri! What has happened?"

"Nothing. Take that gun away. Hide it. No, throw it away—I never want to see it again!" I sobbed.

"You silly darling. Did you want to kill yourself?"

"Take it away! Get out of here!" I shouted. My hand began to sweat and tremble.

"But, Jean-Claude—"

"Get out! Get out!"

That night, I walked along the quays of the Seine as far as the Charenton Bridge, crossed over to the left bank, and walked all the way back to the Auteuil Viaduct. When at last I crawled home, I was relieved to find that Suzon was not there. I was glad of it, for as long as she was out of my sight she was safe.

My mind was made up. Since I was unable to fight, I would see a psychiatrist; better still, instead of wasting precious time with a doctor who would try to talk me into or out of some non-existent state of mind, I would go straight to the Sainte Anne Hospital and beg to be taken in and kept under observation for a while. From there, I would find out where Suzon was and get in touch with her. She would of course come to see me immediately, but everything would be all right, since I myself would ask to be watched closely.

Having made myself a large cup of strong black coffee, I had a cold shower, shaved carefully, dressed, and went out.

What happened on the way down? I do not know. I felt quite fit, but instead of going to the garage to get my car and driving to the hospital, I walked out and jumped on a bus going to the Bourse. It was just nine o'clock when I found myself strolling slowly up the rue Vivienne towards the boulevards, vaguely amused at the way people late for their work were rushing around. I gazed at the shops, and stopped outside a gunsmith's. Then, petrified, I watched my right hand go up to the doorhandle.

The next moment I was inside, asking to see pistols.

A .22 competition pistol, a deadly thing at close range but which

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can still be purchased without a police permit in Paris, was weighing down my coat pocket when I walked out of the shop. I was still thinking of the hospital and still wanting to reach it but, instead, I started walking home. It is surprising that I was not arrested; several times people turned and watched me, taking me for a drunkard, and little dreaming that I was putting up a desperate fight not to go home. I somehow managed to reach the Bois de Boulogne, where I lay on the grass and slept, I think, for it was almost three o'clock when I got up.

It was then that I decided the only thing to do was to get rid of my right hand, and I remembered that there was a surgeon in my street. But, the moment I asked the surgeon if he would cut off my hand, I knew that it was hopeless, and that I was only wasting my time and his—and mine was especially precious since, for all I knew, the hand might again, at any moment, take over. I therefore did not insist but left as rapidly as I could.

Out in the street, the whine of a saw made me turn and stop dead. There, at last, was the solution, the way out of all my troubles!

I walked into the old-fashioned cabinet-maker's shop, pretended to say something, smiled at the man working at the saw and, before my courage failed me, I quickly grasped my wrist and held it against the spinning blade . . . It burnt, but was not otherwise very painful; and, though I felt sick at the sight of my gushing blood, I quietly picked up my hand and slipped it into my coat pocket before sitting down a little heavily and slowly passing out as, sobbing and swearing, the joiner knotted a piece of rope round my arm.

"Your case is not unique, Monsieur Manoque," said Professor Boucot, when the story was finished. "I suppose you know that?"

"I know what you mean, Professor. You think it was schizophrenia, momentarily or perhaps definitely cured through some form of what I believe you call auto-punishment, and that, now I have lost my right hand, I may well be on the road to recovery?"

"That is roughly what it amounts to, Monsieur Manoque. Don't you think so?"

I certainly did, until the Commissaire again called on me that very evening . . .

"About Monsieur Manoque, Doctor—are you quite sure it was an accident?"

"Surely the cabinet-maker who saw the accident can answer that question better than I, Commissaire?"

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"He swears it was no accident."

"And supposing it wasn't, then what?"

"I don't know, I really don't know," said the Commissaire, lighting a cigarette. "Doctor, I haven't the slightest clue, but a coincidence so strange has occurred that it seems there ought to be a clue."

"What coincidence?"

"It amounts to this: a good man and a bad man get drawn together, and they both get their right hand cut off on the same day, at the same time, though in different ways and in different parts of town. Knowing the bad man as I do, there is—something fishy about such a coincidence; but what? That is the question."

"I take it that the good man is Jean-Claude Manoque; could the bad man perhaps be his brother-in-law?"

"What do you know about Ludo 'Billet-Doux,' Doctor?"

"Is that his name?"

"Ludovic Couralin got his nickname of Billet-Doux from his speciality of writing highly-convincing fake love-letters."

"Fake love-letters!" I gasped.

"Yes, generally for blackmail purposes. That was merely one of the strings to his bow. Now, please tell me what you know about his letter-writing!"

"Just a moment. Was forgery another of his—hobbies?"

"Yes. He got five years on one count alone. He's been out almost three years now, and apparently going straight, ever since his sister got him a job in her husband's firm. But you know that he is as crooked as ever, I gather."

"You are right, Commissaire, there is something—but it is something which you will never be able to prove."

"Do you really think so? I am paid to prove things, you know."

"All right, Commissaire, I'll show you that there is something; then I'll prove it, and you will be convinced; but you will never get further than an examining magistrate. Can you be here at nine o'clock sharp tomorrow?"

Finding Monsieur Charles Ralingue was easy. Yes, he had lost a cheque-book and had reported his loss to the bank. Yes, indeed, there had been a query about a ten-thousand franc cheque, but it must have been a mistake for the bank had credited the account with the same amount a few hours later.

At the bank, however, Monsieur Ralingue's eyes nearly popped out of his head when he was shown the cheque for ten thousand francs.

"Ça alors!" he exclaimed. "Yes, it is my signature, all right. But who is this Monsieur Manoque? I can't understand. I am certain that I never wrote or signed this cheque."

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" Don't worry, Monsieur Ralingue, it won't happen again," said the Commissaire.

At the Cochin Hospital, I met Ludovic Couralin, a swarthy, sharp-eyed, beak-nosed, blue-chinned man who flashed a surprisingly pleasant smile at us. He was dressed, and waiting for the nurse who had gone to get his discharge certificate signed.

" Ludo, this is a friend of mine," said the Commissaire, offering him a cigarette. " We know everything about your little game."

" You cops are all the same," he said, laughing but examining me closely. " There is no little game. I have a hundred witnesses, I tell you. The Metro station was crowded with people who saw me fall in front of the train."

" What was it made you fall, Ludo? " I asked, trying to make my voice as smooth as that of the Commissaire.

" Someone grabbed my right arm and pushed me, but no one saw who it was. When I knew that I was off balance and had to fall, I went down as easy as anything and sprawled out on my back, but somehow I was unable to pull my hand away in time. The wheel got it."

" Suppose I tell you who did that? "

" Who? "

" The man whose hand you had been using, Ludo," I said slowly.

" Come on, out with it! " snapped the Commissaire as Ludo sat down on the edge of his bed.

" Out with what? I—I don't know what you're talking about," he gasped, wiping his forehead with his bandaged arm.

" Yes, you do, Ludo," I said softly. " If Jean-Claude had killed his wife the way you had planned—they had no children, no other relatives—you would have come into quite a nice fortune, and what with your brother-in-law ending up with a life sentence for an abominable crime, you would also have found yourself at the head of a prosperous business."

" Poor old Jean-Claude, is that what he thinks? " said Ludo, grinning. " But even if it were true, he can't prove anything, because there isn't anything to prove! "

" Don't be too sure. Jean-Claude doesn't know yet. We discovered it all on our own, Ludo . . ."

" Now, Doctor, and for the last time, will you kindly explain," said the Commissaire as we walked out of the hospital.

" Come to my office and you will hear Jean-Claude himself give you all the answers, Commissaire."

Having made him comfortable there and mixed him a drink, I brought out the tape-recorder.

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For a long time after, he was silent.

"Doctor, it can't be true, can it?" he said at last.

"Is there any other possible explanation, Commissaire? Are you satisfied?"

"Yes and no," he said, finishing his drink. "I feel like the kid the first time he saw a giraffe and didn't believe it. But, supposing that it is true, how could Manoque shove his brother-in-law under the Metro, Doctor?"

"How did Ludo make him try to shoot his wife, forge a signature on a cheque? There are so many forces in nature and in us which we cannot yet understand, Commissaire. Forces which you perhaps classify as strange or surprising coincidences."

As the Commissaire left my house, a heavy flowerpot fell and exploded on the pavement. He was not able to find out which window it had come from and, though I tried, I was unable to tell him that my left hand had suddenly become very hot and started shaking after his departure and that, like an automaton, I had simply followed my hand to the window and watched it push out a flowerpot, the largest it could find.

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ASSIGNMENT PLATYPUS

by Edward Lindall

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THEY were resting on a huge, fallen gum tree that lay in a bed of ferns alongside the foot track they were following through the scrub, lay there as though it had not died and fallen, but had decided out of an ancient weariness to lie down and sleep. Above them younger gums made an openwork pattern against the sky, filtering the morning sun, talking lightly with the breeze.

"Let us be quite clear about this before we go any farther," the girl said coolly. "I'm only showing you where to find platypuses. I'm not helping you catch them."

"I understand," David Struther said.

But all he understood was the surface fact of what she had just told him, and that she had assumed the role of guide only to make sure he did not find the pool where her own colony of tame platypuses lived.

He had no understanding at all of the cause, or causes, of the scarcely veiled hostility that Wendy Hill flourished at him. It had been evident right from the time of his arrival at her father's farmhouse the previous day, and he had felt it was not only because he had come seeking platypuses. There was something deeper that cut across the senses. Now he rubbed a big hand slowly across his big, square chin, and decided to play it soft, knowing he had no choice because he needed her help too much.

"I suppose," she said, "there's not much chance you'll fail to catch your quota." Then she added, with a touch of bitterness, "Not with all your Yankee know-how."

Struther flushed slightly. His wide, good-humoured mouth tightened a little. "It's not Yankee know-how," he said evenly. "It's mine."

"Forgive me," she said ironically.

"You don't like Americans?"

She shrugged. "No less, or more, than I like Australians." She gave him a faint smile. "It depends on the people."

The smile, small though it was and transient, transformed her too grave face. Struther watched her carefully as the smile faded and she turned away. She didn't smile enough, he thought. She was self-possessed yet sensitive, perhaps too sensitive, beautiful in a generous way. Her mouth was wide and full-lipped. She was tall and well-proportioned, broad-shouldered and long-limbed. The top of her head, when they were walking, came to his chin, and there was just over six feet of him. She was blonde, and her wide-set eyes were dark blue, with a suggestion of smoky grey about them. They looked out at the world, Struther thought, with a hint of defensiveness.

"They'll be well looked after, you know," he said quietly.

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" The zoo hasn't sent me here to kill platypuses, but to bring them back alive—and well."

She looked up at him. " I don't doubt that for a moment." She frowned slightly, a ripple of thought and disapproval across her broad, smooth forehead. " But I dislike the thought of them in captivity."

" I don't read you," Struther said, and he was thinking as much about the expression in her eyes as about her words. " There's no cruelty in zoos. Their whole purpose is to spread knowledge. You're a naturalist. You ought to appreciate that."

" I do," she said calmly. " It's just that I doubt its validity."

Struther carefully broke off a sprig of fern, his big fingers surprisingly gentle and precise. He kept his eyes on the delicate leaves because he didn't want at that moment to look at her. He was annoyed at her insistence. It amounted almost to intransigence. Granted that the duck-billed platypus was the world's strangest creature, an animal with a bird's bill, that laid rubbery eggs like a snake's, and suckled its young, that it supplied the missing link between the evolution of reptiles into mammals —granted that Australia was the sole repository of it—did that mean it was sacred?

" Listen," he said carefully. " I value animals, too. They're my work. They're all I know."

She stood up, brushing imaginary dust, or creases, from the dark skirt she wore; long, strong fingers tugging at a fancied disarray of her white blouse. " Time's getting on. We'd better move." She gave him a straight, cold look. " I also dislike the thought of our platypuses being taken to a foreign country."

" Your Government doesn't mind," Struther said steadily. " They've given me a licence for four."

" So that makes everything all right! The official blessing of a rubber stamp."

She strode off then down the narrow foot track, shoulders squared like a guardsman on parade, head held back. And Struther could do nothing else but follow. There had been deep scorn in her voice, and he felt a deepening of his annoyance. He was a man slow to anger, but Wendy Hill was getting underneath his skin like a burr, itching and prickling at his self-control. She abraded him, and yet he felt there was some strange affinity between them, something apart from their love of animals. He could not place it.

He was constructed generally to go with his height, this David Struther. He had wide shoulders and a barrel chest, hands, feet, and legs to match. His face was big and strong, wide to squareness, and the strong bones of it, like his body, were covered by

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only the exact amount of flesh necessary. He was an athlete with a thinker's eyes. They were dark brown and large, possessed of calmness and, in their depths, a gentleness. There was also in them, unknown to him, something of that same defensiveness he had observed in Wendy Hill's.

He was considering her now and the wry humour of the naturalist down in Melbourne who had sent him up here to Anglevale to search for his platypuses, armed with a helpful introductory letter and a brief understatement that was no good at all.

"Go up to Anglevale in the real platypus country, and stay with old George Hill," the naturalist had said. "Get his daughter Wendy on your side, and all your troubles will be over. She knows more about 'em than anyone else in the country." He had also added that it would not be easy to enlist Wendy Hill's assistance. And that was the understatement, the wry humour that Struther had not appreciated until he had parked his caravan in the Hill's home paddock and gone up to the house to make his bow.

How simple it would have been in those first five minutes to have picked a fight with Wendy Hill! She had been provocative, and he had been resentful, truculent almost. He had been thrown off balance to have found her a young, good-looking girl when he had expected a plain, middle-aged scientist. It was illogical, he knew, but he had had little logic about women since Catherine had left him. He distrusted them. Only George Hill's open charm and his own need of Wendy had braked his tongue. His lips twitched now in a faint, ironic grin. The things a man did for his job . . .

As a stranger, a lone American, in this up-country woods and water district of the State of Victoria, Australia, he needed all the help that was around. He had this mission to collect four platypuses for a rich middle-west zoo, and he reckoned it to be a tough one, tougher than so many other missions he had carried out for other zoos . . . lions in Africa, Indian elephants, Burmese cobras, pandas from the Himalayas . . . Tougher because the platypus was shy and delicate.

He had a knack with animals, a sureness that stemmed from instinct, a touch that seemed to anticipate their moods of fear and anger, contentedness and despair, an understanding, an intuition . . . He had made a name for himself around the world as an animal man. But he was worried about these platypuses. They weren't ordinary creatures. You didn't just catch them and load them in a crate. You nursed them, identified yourself with them. You packed them in wet grass and moss and sawdust to control

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their temperatures, cossetted them with several thousand special earth-worms carried in special earth—and you sent up daily prayers that they would not pine away from a fancied lack of solicitude, from homesickness, or from an attack of simple sulks.

There was, of course, an answer, but the problem was too difficult for him to come by it. Wendy Hill's tame platypuses, living in a pool somewhere in this tangle of scrubland, were so used to human contact—they fed from her hand, came to her call, so he'd been told—that they would fly the Pacific like veteran tourists. If he could have four of them . . .

Struther shook his big head in a sadness of defeat. He had dreamed it might be possible on his way from Melbourne, buoyed up by past experiences. He had offered money, and had it thrown back in his face. He had tried to argue, and found his words bouncing from the brick wall of Wendy Hill's antipathy. And he had acknowledged that the best he could expect from her was help in showing him wild haunts, the way a mother fox would lead the hunt far from her cubs.

" Here's your pool," Wendy Hill said suddenly.

Struther came back from his thinking, and they were in a grassy clearing. A pool sparkled just ahead, grass all the way up to it this side and trees and bushes lining its far bank. It was, he saw, a fat bulge in a small creek, probably spring-fed, dammed at both ends by massive rocks. He sent his dark eyes keenly probing the environs, tabbing the features for when he would need to know them in the dusk, when terrain had a trick of changing.

" Your role is to come out here about an hour before sunset," Wendy Hill said quietly. " Lie down behind a bush and wait for dusk. If you're lucky, they'll come out and play here in the grass, like puppies—and sounding like them too . . ."

Struther nodded. " I've got a good-sized net."

" Be gentle." Her voice was sharp. " Concentrate on one only."

" I need four."

" You won't get them in one grab. I'll show you other pools."

" All right," he said. " One at a time."

This was stuff he knew, but he wouldn't tell her that. Let her talk on. Let her help, if she had a mind for it. He had read up extensively on the platypus and its habits before coming on this mission. He knew all there was in the books. It was the practical field experience that he needed to borrow.

She hadn't given him a wrong steer about this pool, he saw. Across the water, the far bank was dotted with the tiny entrances of burrows, each one cunningly placed among tree or bush roots,

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built so small that the little animals had to struggle through the entrances and so squeeze their thick fur dry before entering the nests. He knew also that for every entrance above the surface there was another under it. The platypus might look crazy, but he didn't act it. He had needed to be clever to remain the same when all the rest of the world was changing form.

"There's a full moon tomorrow night," she said. "If the wind stays down, I'd suggest you make your first try then."

Struther took his eyes away from the pool to look at her, and became aware of tension. She wasn't liking this. "Sure," he said.

"You know the problems you'll have—the difficulties of getting them to America?"

"I've read up on it," Struther said. "I'm hoping you might give me some advice."

She shrugged. Her shoulders moved, but her face was still. "What else can I do?"

"You could let me have some from your pool."

"No." The word was flung like a grenade, explosive and desperate.

Struther rubbed a hand across the thick, unruly thatch of his dark hair. "They breed," he said. "In time there'll be too many for the pool."

"They migrate," she said, and her voice was cold and brittle. "Even if they didn't, the answer would still be no." She paused, like a fighter measuring a punch. "They're not for foreign sacrifice."

Struther's brown eyes hardened. Although she had only restated her position and he had expected it, although her manner was no more hostile than it had always been, somehow she sparked a sudden intolerance in him.

"Understand this, Miss Hill," he said harshly. "My licence is for four platypuses. It doesn't say where they have to come from. Your tame ones, your pets, are public property. They don't belong to you. There's nothing to stop me taking them."

"You wouldn't." She had turned away, but now she swung round, her body stressed against stiff legs, her face tense, and her voice a hushed noise deep in her throat.

"I have only to track down a dozen or so creeks to find the pool," he went on bleakly. "You treat me as though I were a gangster. I might as well behave like one—and get some of the rewards."

"Oh, no." She moved swiftly and clutched him by an arm, fingers digging with an almost convulsive power. "You couldn't do a thing like that. I don't believe it. I won't . . ."

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Struther looked down at her, into the soft, lovely face that was now so disarranged, the lips that were parted and held awry, into the dark blue eyes that were so wide . . . And in them he saw fear. It shocked him, for it seemed so out of character, so exaggerated. His anger drained away. He put one of his big square hands over her long slim one. The contact seemed to calm her. And out of it there came to him a sense of understanding. The platypuses were, to her, some sort of symbol, something by which she hoped to obliterate an ugliness that had put scars on her. And he wondered, could it be a man hurt? It would explain a lot of things.

"Don't worry," he said quietly. "I won't do anything."

"Promise," she said, her voice a whisper, soft, yet strident still with fear.

"Promise," he said. "I spoke in anger. Something I didn't mean."

She moved slightly and he took his hand away. Her face had lost its tension; only an underlying pallor remained to show how badly she had been shaken. "I'm sorry," she said quietly. "Sorry for the way I've acted . . . but the platypuses have come to mean everything to me. You see—" She hesitated, and looked searchingly into his eyes for a moment. "I was going to be married, and well . . . he changed his mind. I came back home and turned to science—to this."

"I think I knew." Struther's tone was gentle. "I understand."

And this time he really did, for the defensive mechanism of the badly hurt was something he had known from way back. Five years, almost to the day, in point of fact. It was then that Catherine had left him after only one year of marriage, having tried with tears and tirades, plans and plots, to make him give up his animal collecting and take a city job.

He had tried it, too, but the tyranny of commuting, the chain sores of a desk, the social flummeries that Catherine had demanded, were more than he could take. He had gone back to the job he loved, roaming the world, working with the wild creatures with whom he seemed to have more affinity than with his own. Affinity? He nodded slowly to himself. This was the feeling he had had for Wendy Hill and been unable to identify. They had both been hurt.

"Tomorrow," Wendy Hill said quietly, "I'll take you to my pool."

Struther cupped a big hand under her left elbow. "Thank you. Your pets are safe with me."

"I know that now," she said

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"And you don't hate zoos?"
"I never really did," she said.
They started back for home.

Wendy Hill's secret pool was a mile south of the house, shaped like a fat boomerang and lined with trees and bushes, except for a stretch of about twenty feet where grass made a little meadow. The air was clear and fresh that day. With a peopled silence, Struther thought, as though all the platypuses under the banks had their radars tuned. He was tingling with the excitement of expectation. He was going to see something that few people had seen before, and he had, too, a sense of peace that this should be possible, that Wendy Hill should have accepted him in trust. He had no feeling of achievement, of having overcome an obstacle to his mission. There was no mission here, only a new camaraderie of two people who loved animals. It was a benison of a day.

"Stand back in the trees," Wendy Hill said quietly. "Don't move more than necessary."

"Quiet as a mouse," Struther said.

Her dark blue eyes took in his bulk. She smiled slightly. "A substantial mouse."

She took the bucket he had carried from the farmhouse and went down to the water's edge, graceful as a young tree. She hunkered down, and gave a funny sort of growling bark, deep in the back of her throat. She kept it up for perhaps two minutes, raising and lowering the volume, altering the cadences slightly . . .

Then Struther saw a ripple on the surface of the pool. He looked harder and could pick out the part of a head, a lump of furry back, and a section of stumpy tail. The first platypus was swimming in. He craned forward; a nervous little pulse beat in his neck. Wendy Hill did not move; nor did she stop her growling bark. And then Struther saw other ripples on the surface of the pool, other three-point references to partially submerged bodies, all of them converging on the meadow.

Wendy Hill reached for the bucket and tipped its contents on the ground. Quietly, and with a minimum of movement, her right hand picked about the emptied earth and loaded her left hand with worms. She put the hand on the ground, just at the water's edge, and Struther saw a ripple dart forward, then break up as a platypus waded in the shallows. Wendy drew her hand back slowly, and the creature came out of the water and began snuffling its duck bill among the worms.

Struther had seen a platypus before, in the Bronx Zoo platypusary, but never in its natural habitat. It looked even stranger

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than in captivity. His hands were trembling as he stared. About eighteen inches long, it had four short, flipper-like webbed feet equipped with claws. Its head grew out of its body seemingly without a neck, and its broad, flat bill was almost exactly like a duck's. Struther knew he was looking at a living fossil, an ungainly creature that was the most mixed-up mammal in the world.

No wonder, he thought, that early naturalists in England had believed they were being hoaxed when the first dead specimens arrived from the Australian colonies. They had looked for signs of stitchery such as they had found in " mermaids " brought by trusting sailors from Malaya, where astute Chinese had stitched the top halves of monkeys and the tails of fishes so cleverly together that only the closest examination had disclosed the fraud.

There were now some half-dozen platypuses rooting in the pile of earth near the bucket, growling and butting each other in a greedy quest for food. Wendy Hill got up and wandered slowly back to the trees where Struther stood hidden. She turned her back on him.

" Have you seen enough? "

" I could stay all day," Struther whispered.

" They won't," she said. " Soon as the worms are gone they'll go back into their burrows . . . the males to sleep, the females to sit on their eggs."

Struther then felt the delayed impact of admiration for her. He had always considered himself good with animals; now he had met his equal in this tall, half-shy Australian girl. The demonstration she had just given had been sheer wizardry. He warmed to her, not as to a woman but as to a kindred spirit of the highest order.

" Tell me," he said carefully. " How can I pick the sexes? I want two of each."

" You won't be able to tell at dusk. You'll have to take what's offering and sort them out later." She turned her head slightly. " Quickest way is to look at the hind legs. The males have a poison spur, a left-over from their reptile ancestors."

" Strong poison? "

" It will kill a dog. So keep your hands well clear."

" I will," Struther grinned. " I've collected cobras and kraits, rattlers and taipans. I don't propose to get myself poisoned by a platypus."

She swung around. " Don't take it lightly. It could make you mighty sick."

Struther looked at her closely, with a quickening interest. There had been a touch of anxiety in her voice. Could it be for

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him? he wondered. But he found no ready answer, and was unwilling at that moment to search too deeply. He forced his eyes away and saw that the platypuses had all gone.

"You've frightened off your little friends."

"I have a knack of doing that," she said.

There was an incredible bitterness in her voice, and Struther wanted to take her in his arms, to tax her with it, to tell her she was talking nonsense, that she was man-shy without reason. But diffidence held him back, and the residue of his own experience. You didn't wrap your arms around a girl because of a sudden emotional urge, or touch her with your hands as an animal to be reassured. Certainly, he thought wryly, you didn't do it to someone you were consulting in a professional capacity.

Then, despite himself, telling himself he was doing wrong, he reached out and put his big hands gently on her shoulders, turning her round. "You haven't frightened me away."

She looked up at him with a strange, almost myopic, intentness, and he saw that the smoky grey of her eyes had almost swamped the blue. Her face was soft with misery. "I tried."

"And failed," he said quietly.

And when she opened her mouth to answer, he pulled her towards him and she came easily. He kissed her on the lips.

She responded for a moment, then broke away, her eyes confused, a touch of surprise in them, perplexity and, perhaps, a spark of anger.

"You shouldn't have done that."

"No," Struther said, keeping his voice level with an effort, trying to quieten the tumult that shouted in his head, the excitement that clamoured in his body. "I don't suppose I should."

Late that afternoon, with the sun sinking to its couch and the pink galahs shrieking homeward in vast flocks, with gold dust atop the hills and shadows making cold cathedrals in the trees, Struther left his caravan and struck out for his trysting pool. He carried a snare net rolled under one arm, and an electric torch in his hip pocket. They were all the equipment that he needed. He kept well clear of the house, because he didn't want to meet Wendy Hill. The feel of her lips was still with him, the soft suppleness of her body under his hands. And the look in her eyes was with him, too. It confused him. He felt awkward, a clumsy blunderer whose big body had been stumbling in a china shop.

"You shouldn't have done that," she had said when he had kissed her, and he still didn't know what his answer should have

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been. He was disturbed, deeply and provocatively, in a way he hadn't known in years. He had a crazy urge to cut and run, but he knew he had to stick it out. He had a job to do—now probably on his own.

He took up a position behind a thick bush near the pool that Wendy Hill had picked out for him. He lay flat on his stomach, with the snare net beside his right hand and the electric torch on his left. He forced himself into a thought hiatus as the waiting hour ticked by, a trick he had learnt in other parts to spin time away and keep the mind alert. Start thinking and you could be dead was a maxim he had learnt early on an Indian tiger hunt. The trick was to turn yourself into a receiving-station for all the messages that were in the air.

He kept his eyes moving slowly round the little clearing because staring at one object could make them play tricks, kept his body still except for the most minute of movements, waiting for the time when the platypuses had finished rooting for worms and shellfish in the oozy bottom of their pool and would come ashore to romp.

Several times he thought he sensed someone else in or near the clearing. He probed around with his eyes, not daring to do more, but found no evidence to back his senses. They could be wrong, of course, he knew. Prolonged waiting in silence and immobility could produce odd sensations. And at intervals there came small splashing thumps as insect-feeding platypuses crash-dived in the pool. There was the possibility that he was confusing these with other night sounds to build a false impression. He flexed his arms and forced his mind back to its vacuum state again.

The first platypus surprised him despite his watchfulness. It came with the early dusk. At one time there was nothing, then this little creature was waddling up from the water. It stopped and rubbed its bill along the grass, then turned over and wriggled and rolled, like a dog in a sandpit, growling in ecstasy. Struther's right hand took up the net, but the creature was at doubtful throwing distance. He waited. There would be more.

And he was right. Three others joined the first within a few minutes, growling and rolling, with the joy of full bellies and the earthy massage. But they were all just a little beyond certain distance.

The dusk was settling to night now, and Struther had only just decided to run in and cast his net, when a fight developed. Two of the platypuses jumped another, striking at it with their claws. It turned and ran, or rather, waddled, straight for Struther's bush.

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He jumped up and dropped the net over it, ran round the bush and scooped it up, wrapping the net gently about it, feeling the thrill of satisfaction at his capture, the fine soft body fur sleek against his hands . . . Then a sudden pain shot through his right arm, just above the wrist. He cursed and nearly dropped the platypus.

He had to discipline himself to place it gently on the ground; but he did so, not wanting to hurt it, knowing it was too thoroughly enmeshed to escape. He went back behind the bush and got his torch. It showed a puncture on his forearm, marked by a streak of blood. He had expected it, had expected worse, but somehow the act of seeing it brought a sudden spurt of alarm, and he had to fight it down. It didn't go down easily. He turned the torch on the platypus and could see the poison spur, only half an inch long but ugly with the threat of evil. He clamped his left hand tight above the wound.

Then Wendy Hill was at his side. She grabbed the torch and turned it on his arm. "David," she said. Her voice was high and taut. "David."

Struther stared at her, hearing the anxiety in her tone, seeing it urgent on her face in the backlight of the torch, knowing it was for him but unable yet to comprehend. "I thought there was someone out there in the trees," he said.

"Forget it," she said crisply. "We've got to work fast."

Her crispness shook out his surprise. He accepted her. "What's the drill?"

"Same as for snakebite." She thrust out a hand. "Give me your belt. We need a tourniquet."

Struther took off his belt. Here he was being ordered around and liking it.

She fixed the belt high on his wounded arm. "You've got a knife?"

He shook his head.

"The torch will do," she said quickly. She unscrewed the glass and smashed it with her heel. "Here, hold this." She thrust the still functioning torch into his left hand. "Shine it on the wound."

She slashed the puncture wound across two ways, then bent to suck the blood, but Struther pulled back. "I can do that."

"Good," she said. "Then we'll do it walking." She took back the torch, picked up one end of the net, and rolled the platypus free. It scuttled, growling, into the darkness of the pool.

"Come on," she said. "We'll get you a shot of snakebite serum. We've got it at the house."

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" I'll be all right now," Struther said.

" Probably," she snapped. " But we'll make sure."

Struther's arm was beginning to hurt. Spurts of pain ran up it like burning arrows, but he shut his jaws against them. There were things about Wendy Hill that he had to find out. Now, before the moment passed and he would be left to start all over again.

" Before we go anywhere," he said carefully. " How come you were out here?"

" Let's go," she said.

Struther shook his head. " When you've answered."

" I thought you might need help." Her voice was low. Her face was a white blur in the darkness. " You still do."

Struther felt an excitement rising in him, fostered not so much by what she had said but by the way she had said it, with a soft beat of nuances that paralleled his own. He lifted a big hand and touched her hair. " We both need help."

Then somehow, although he was not conscious of any movement, she was against his chest. He wrapped his arms about her, and the right one hurt like hell but he didn't care. And when his lips found hers there was no pain anywhere.

" You were right about that pool of mine," she said softly, head turned against his shoulder. " It is becoming crowded."

Struther smiled down at her and brushed his lips across her hair. " We'll take our four from there," he said, " and travel as a family."

" Our four," she murmured. " The six of us."

And it was not until the silence of the bush was broken, minutes later, by the crash-dive of a platypus, that they remembered his right arm.

" The serum," Wendy said.

Struther turned her about and wrapped his good left arm around her waist. " A formality," he said solemnly. " I'm already cured."

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THE PLATYPUS

I like the duck-billed platypus
Because it is anomalous.
I like the way it raises its family,
Partly birdly, partly mammaly.
I like its independent attitude.
Let no one call it a duck-billed platitude.

OGDEN NASH, *The Astignatic Naturalist*

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GAMBLING MAN

I thought I'd have a go—
the outsider sometimes wins

BY VICTOR FRANCIS

I WAS sitting in a front seat on the upper deck of a number 11 bus, gazing, through the plate-sized patch I had cleared in the steamed-up window, at the back of another number 11 bus, and wondering idly what strange chemistry caused public transport vehicles first to conglomerate into convoys and then to grind to a halt whenever I boarded one. It had been raining. The glass was speckled with drops and, as I watched, the flat ones at the top began to roll down, swallowing up smaller drops on their way and increasing speed until they splotched into nothingness at the bottom.

I must have looked as bored as I felt, because the man beside me grinned matily and said, "If I were a gambling man, I wouldn't take evens that we'll be at Charing Cross in under quarter of an hour."

"If I were a gambling man . . ." Raindrops trickling down a steamy window . . . Two fragments of memory suddenly came together, and as I sat there it was as if the damp, grey London that surrounded me melted away and I was once again in that incongruous airport guest-house in the heart of Africa, ten years younger but, that pouring afternoon, just as bored and impatiently helpless.

I had delivered a plane-load of electrical equipment to the mines at Lumba and was on my way, empty, back north, when my partner—who was also my co-pilot, navigator, flight engineer, and friend—decided at eight thousand feet to have an attack of the raving heebie-jeebies. That's what he and I called it, although the doctors had another name for the sudden vicious bouts of fever to which he had been subject since he left the Army in 1945.

I knew these attacks. Get him to bed for forty-eight hours with a load of quinine, and he'd be fine—until the next time. Make him stick it out for several hours in an unheated aircraft, and he'd be dead.

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I was none too happy. Mercifully, Fred was a good navigator to the last gasp. Before he passed out he stabbed a trembling finger at the flight plan and muttered, "M'bwewe . . . private field . . . try and make it, chum."

"I will if you will," I told him, unnecessarily; and forty minutes later I put the plane down on the bumpy airstrip about as lightly as a drunken sailor falling out of a hammock, but none the less in one piece.

After I had ensconced Fred in a surprisingly luxurious bedroom, where he would be able to sweat his way to recovery, I began to get my bearings. I had heard a good deal about M'bwewe, although I had never before had the excuse to land there. It was one of the half-dozen private airfields maintained by the vast M'bwewe Trading Company solely for the use of their own planes. At each, so the story went, a superb guest-house was maintained at day-and-night West End standards just in case the Boss decided to drop in. Roughneck freight fliers like myself used to joke that, apart from winning the pools, the softest touch in the business would be to crash-land at M'bwewe.

Now I'd done roughly that, and I began to find that luxury wasn't everything. I ate food that would have done credit to the best restaurant in Soho. I drank until liquor practically came out of my ears, and I was told everything was on the house. And I hadn't a soul to talk to. The place was packed with servants too well trained to utter more than servilities, and there was no one else.

For twenty-four hours I revelled in it. After forty-eight hours it was clear that Fred was having a rougher time than usual and would need another two or three days' rest before he was fit to talk, let alone move. On the third day the rains started, and I was almost talking to the furniture.

By mid afternoon I was fed up with the bar, and I went to bed to try to sleep a few leaden hours away. The drumming of the rain drove me nearly crazy, and at seven I could stand it no more. I showered, shaved, and wandered disconsolately along the carpeted corridors. Inevitably, I found myself heading back to the bar. I was so sure of what I would find—a lot of full bottles and empty armchairs—that I didn't even raise my eyes from their mesmerised study of my feet as I walked in.

And then a voice—not just a voice, but a Cockney voice—chirped at me, "Be a nice day for the time of year, if it wasn't for all this flamin' rain, wouldn' it, chum!"

He was sitting by the far wall, his back to a huge plate-glass window, his legs tucked under a mosaic-topped table. A rug

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was wrapped cosily round his bottom half and above it I could see a white shirt, dark striped tie, and blue waistcoat and jacket which should have been utterly out of place but which made me feel gauche in my bush shirt.

"Where the hell did you come from?" I asked in my amazement.

"Andrew Street, London, E.14, if you go back far enough," he answered. "But more recently, which is presumably what you 'ave in mind, from Crocodile Creek, which is a stretch of the river five hours' Land-Roverin' away. Any more questions?"

"Sorry," I apologised. "I've been walking around this dressed-up Dartmoor for three days, getting sicker and sicker of my own company. Guess I've forgotten my manners. I ought to explain. I brought my plane in because—"

"I know," he interrupted. "They told me about it. Your mate'll be all right: one of the boys is with him all the time. Nice to 'ear of a man standin' by his friend. Reckon you've cost yourself about a hundred quid in lost freight through not pressin' on to your next trip."

"They make 'em shrewd in Andrew Street, London, E.14."

"Yes, we don't miss much," he said easily. "Have a drink?"

"They're on the house."

"I know," he said. "But I never drink alone, so you'd be doing me a favour."

The barman, who by now was familiar with my tipple, also knew without being told what the stranger liked in his glass. After the drink he was no longer such a stranger. I knew him as John Porter, trader, who'd been forty years in Africa, and who was sympathetically amused by my state of jitters.

"Hell, this rain!" I burst out, glaring at the dripping windows.

"Relax, mate. Amuse yourself. It'll be over by tomorrow. You're a long time dead!"

"*Amuse myself!* Are you kidding? Why . . ."

"Now, if I were a gambling man," he grinned, "I'd teach you how to pass the time."

"Sorry—I left my roulette wheel at home," I grunted, lighting my pipe.

"Your matchbox'll do," he said. "No, don't open it. How many matches inside? I've got a quid says there're twenty-seven."

"Nearer fifteen," I said involuntarily.

We counted them. My guess was the closer and he gave me a pound.

I began to cheer up.

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"How many bottles on the bar shelves?" he asked. "I say there're thirty-one—for a pound."

I snatched a fleeting glance, and guessed wildly at twenty-five.

"Thirty," the barman told us. "He—" with a beam at me—"finished a bottle of gin this morning." But John Porter got his pound back.

"You wouldn't have counted?" I said.

"Got to even up the odds a bit," he answered. "After all, you had more chance than me to know what was in your match-box! Let's try one fair and square." He turned to the window at his back. "We'll each pick a raindrop at the top of the glass, and I'll bet you a quid mine rolls down to the bottom before yours!"

It's probably hard to believe in the middle of London, but in that lonely sodden spot, no more than a fly-blown speck on the map of Africa, I gambled on those tantalising, trickling raindrops with more excitement than any fashionable punter can have experienced at Ascot. I don't know how long we were at it, urging on the recalcitrant globules of moisture, wildly increasing the odds, but in the end I was more relaxed than I'd been for days. And, incidentally, by some unlikely chance or improbable guesswork, no more than two pounds had changed hands.

John Porter smiled across at me. "Happier now?"

I grinned agreement. "You certainly are a gambling man—and I can see it has its point in the right circumstances."

"So long as you know what the stakes are. I could tell you . . ." He slumped into thought for a moment. "I'll tell you a story for a nightcap. Forty years ago I was right on my beam ends, mate. I'd spent every penny of the thirty quid I'd brought out here a year before, and somehow I found myself, dead broke and hopeless, at Crocodile Creek, the place I was at earlier today. Easy to tell how it got its name: that stretch of the river was alive with the ugliest reptiles you ever did see.

"Well, in the course of disposing of my last bit of Birmingham brass to the natives, I heard their favourite local story. Seemed that, way back, a German trader had been lamming it down-river with a bundle of diamonds he'd acquired in the north by means which necessitated his quick exit. He got as far as Crocodile Creek when the boat overturned, the crocs had a tasty meal—"

"And the diamonds?"

"Still, presumably, in the bottom of the boat. The natives even pointed out the exact spot, where a rotted spar stuck up."

"And no one had tried to get them?"

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"Not and lived. Not with those crocodiles! If I were a gambling man, I thought, I'd 'ave a go. Odds about 100–1 against me. But still, the outsider sometimes wins!

"Then I realised I hadn't much to lose anyway—broke, hungry, stranded. So, without giving myself more time to think, I plunged in and took a chance."

"And the crocodiles? The diamonds?"

He grinned at me tantalisingly. "Reckon I came out with what I deserved. I gambled, and what I got made me the man I am today. Work it out! I'm for bed." He signalled the barman.

"But the diamonds?"

"I got 'em," he said. "They set me up. Guess you hadn't realised that I *am* the M'Bwewe Trading Company! Then, I hadn't a cent. Today, I suppose I'm worth a million. G'night."

I realised that the barman was pulling aside the table. Then I saw he had wheeled up an invalid chair. Gently he placed one hand round John Porter's shoulders and the other under his blanketed thighs, lifted him into the chair, and wheeled him out.

I had to know. I tackled the barman as soon as he returned. "The Boss?" he said. "He not walked for forty years. Not since the crocodile took his legs in river . . ."

I pulled myself together with an effort. My London bus was moving again. The passenger at my side was still chatting. "Good thing you didn't take me up on my bet," he said. "I'd have lost."

"You needn't worry," I told him. "I'm not what you'd call a gambling man. Gave it up ten years ago when I met a *real* gambler."

"Oh! Scared of losing?"

"No," I answered slowly. "Of winning."

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MAIGRET
returns to
ARGOSY

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By the author of the best-seller, "Seal Morning"

A TIME FROM THE WORLD

THE waves swept over the stretch of white beach. In the distance the Island of Lewis floated on the blue-green waters like Tir-nan-Og, the Kingdom of Faery. Few people roamed these parts except the crofters who lived here and the wandering tinkers. The white beach stretched away for mile upon mile, both north and south, and you could have it all to yourself. I turned and gazed inland.

I stood on a belt of vivid green machair, or sea grass, which was dotted with pinks and over which strutted several white gulls. Just a short way beyond the machair where the lighter green meadowlands started, was a lonely little croft. This was inhabited by an old tinker couple who, after a lifetime spent travelling, had at last "settled down." At least they stayed put during winter and spring. In summer they would lock the door of the croft, give the two goats and the cat into the care of neighbours, and set out once again for the open road. Farther inland were five other crofts which comprised the clachan. These were huddled together as though for company. Rounded hills lay in the background. The farther inland the fewer the trees; acres of Ross-and-Cromarty and Sutherland have not got so much as a solitary birch between them.

As I gazed at the scene before me, I thought once again how marvellous is the colouring of the landscape in these parts on a fine day. There is a pristine quality about it, and a subtle aura of mystery is imbued in the atmosphere which can be felt but not described.

I sat down on the machair and watched the old woman come out of the byre, followed by the two white goats. Every morning the old tinker woman would lead the goats over to a pine-strip

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BY

ROWENA FARRE

which lay a short distance from the croft. She would tether them near a stream and in the late afternoon bring them back to the croft for milking.

I had first met this old couple when I was living in Sutherland. They had been travelling the roads in an open cart and sleeping at nights in their tent or in barns. During the day they worked in the fields as pickers. I had got into conversation with them, and they told me that they owned a small croft in Wester Ross and that I would be welcome to put up there with them for a few nights should I ever be in those parts. I had taken them at their word, and for the past two nights I had slept in my sleeping-bag on the floor of the croft parlour. The old man and woman slept on a large mattress on the floor of the one small bedroom.

My plan for the approaching summer months was to travel with tinkers for a while, then wend my way farther south into England and spend the rest of the summer and autumn with

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gipsy friends. I knew many gipsies, but my acquaintanceship with tinkers was limited to this one couple for, though I had spoken to many families of tinkers I had met on the roads and in the Fort William district, I had yet to travel with them. I had hoped that my elderly friends, whose names were Mr. Connor Digby and Mrs. Maggie Digby, would be able to put me in touch with other members of their fraternity. But all their relatives and friends roamed these far northern areas, and they said they knew few tinkers who travelled farther south, the direction in which I was heading. So it seemed that after all I would have to make my own contacts with these people.

The old woman walked slowly towards the pine-strip, the two goats following dutifully at her heels. Rain or shine, she always wore a shawl over her head, which she removed only in the croft. She had told me that she was in her mid-seventies. But this I rather doubted in spite of her deeply-wrinkled skin, tanned a deep russet through living for decades in the open air. It is the habit of both tinker and gipsy women to add several years to their age once the middle years are past, for the elderly matriarch has an honourable place among these people. I mentally deducted ten years from Mrs. Digby's stated age. Of course she had no knowledge of the precise year or month in which she was born—few of the older gipsies and tinkers have, for children's birthdays are never celebrated, nor are their babies usually officially registered at an office even in these days.

I walked over to the croft. Mr. Connor Digby was sitting on a cane chair outside the building, smoking his pipe. He performed the minimum of chores in the smallholding which adjoined the croft, and it was a mystery to their neighbours how the pair got the necessary cash to live even the simple existence they did.

" It was very kind of you and your wife to put me up," I said. " I've enjoyed my stay with you both immensely. I'll be leaving tomorrow and going down to Fort William."

" Ach, dinna go tomorrow," the old man said at once.

" I must start moving south before long," I said.

" There's plenty o' time yet before the picking season starts, and there's a wee job I'd like ye to do for me afore ye leave."

" What is it? " I asked.

" D'ye ken anything about money? "

" Money? " I said with surprise.

" Aye."

" Well, a little," I answered dubiously.

It is one of the misfortunes of my life that my monetary knowledge is extremely limited; money had come my way in the smallest of dribs and drabs.

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" Anyway," said Mr. Digby with assurance, " ye've had more experience wi' money than I have."

" Oh, I certainly wouldn't say that! "

" I reckon ye have, and ye know all about postal savings books and banks? "

" Well . . ."

" I thought so. Come inside a moment," he said, raising a finger to indicate strict secrecy.

We sat down at the table.

" Now I'll tell ye about the wee job I want ye to do for me. And you must gie me your word that ye won't say naught to them about it."

The " them," I gathered, meant his crofter neighbours.

" Aye, them's a rare sneaking, inquisitive lot. But I reckon you can trust the chaps who work in the banks."

He walked over to a cupboard and opened a drawer. " When we go awa' in the summer we leave this sack under a floorboard and trust to luck that they won't unlock the door and sneak about in here and discover it. But we're taking a risk, ye must admit."

" You certainly are," I said, not having the vaguest idea what he was talking about, though I gathered that money was involved somewhere.

He undid the string and opened out the neck of a medium-sized flour-sack which had once contained something like four pounds of flour but which now contained pounds of a different order.

He tipped up the sack, and coins and notes rose in a mound on the table. I gasped.

" How much about d'ye reckon there was in the sack? "

" About two hundred pounds? " I ventured.

" Well, I tell ye there's more than five hundred. We've been saving up for the past fifteen years. What I want ye to do is to go along to the township tomorrow and have it put in the bank for us. Will ye do that? "

" Yes, if you wish it," I said without enthusiasm.

" I've already opened a small account there. I think it would be best if ye put this in for us, as ye've had more experience handling money."

I was about to protest, but he held up a hand. " I'm not much guid at dealing wi' large sums at banks, and I reckon they'd find it easier if ye did the job for me."

He handed me a scrap of paper on which he had written in rounded handwriting that I, Miss Rowena Farre, had been delegated by himself, Mr. Connor Digby, to pay in the money—uncounted—contained in the sack, to his current account.

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I was somewhat surprised that he was able to write, for few tinkers of his age can do so, having had next to no schooling. As I was putting the slip of paper away in a pocket, Mrs. Digby came through the door.

" Aye, Maggie, she'll go along for us."

" That's fine," Mrs. Digby said. Then, turning to me, " And you can do a bit o' shopping for yourself while you're there and maybe get a few odds and ends for me too. Take the early bus and come back by the late one. That'll give ye a guid day in the township."

Somewhat overwhelmed by the task which had been allotted me, I sat down by the peat fire and accepted a strong cup of tea.

My hostess removed the scarf from her head and sat down opposite me. She wore her white hair plaited and coiled over her ears, gipsy fashion.

" When I was a younger woman it was a dark red," she said, when I complimented her on its whiteness. It had not got that yellow tinge old people's hair often has.

" Connor always says it was my red hair that first attracted him when I was working in the fields wi' my family. I was around fifteen or sixteen at the time and we were married that same season. I don't mean, o' course, that we were wedded in a kirk. We were only officially wedded last year by the minister, as I've told ye."

It seemed that the minister had persuaded them to get married in the kirk and had instructed them in the wedding service. Now they were officially wed and were proud of the fact. Moreover, the minister had presented them with a copy of the Bible and every evening, before going to " bed " on the mattress, Mr. Digby would read out a portion from the Book.

We were not let off that evening, and no sooner had we finished our supper of fried tomatoes, sausages, and bread, swilled down with several cups of tea, than Mr. Digby took the Bible from a shelf and began thumbing slowly through the pages. I groaned inwardly. Time meant nothing to the old man, and on the first evening of my stay the reading had seemed to go on for well over an hour. Presently he stopped turning over the leaves and said to me, " Well maybe this evening you'd like to choose a chapter for me to read out. Is there any special piece you'd like? "

" I should like you to read the story of Joseph and the coat of many colours," I said, " and how the brothers threw him into a well and he was sold into Egypt."

I found the chapter in Genesis, Mr. Digby raised a patriarchal hand, and the reading started.

" Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children because

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he were the son o' his auld age, and he made him a coat o' many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him and could nae speak peaceably unto him . . ."

The paraffin lamp cast a warm light over the old tinker as he sat at the table, one finger following the line of print. The goats munched their fodder in the byre next door and every so often stamped a hoof, the cat lay curled up in front of the fire, and Mrs. Digby sat listening attentively, her hands clasped together on her lap. Occasionally my thoughts strayed: to the pine-woods outside, to the waves rushing up the beach, then back to the sonorous voice: ". . . And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people o' the land. And Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him wi' their faces to the earth . . ."

Finally, Mr. Digby closed the Bible. The reading had come to an end.

The next morning the old tinker woman cooked me a good breakfast, and the sack was taken from the drawer once more and put into a large wicker basket of the type which is used for hawking. Then it was covered over with a checked cloth.

" You shouldn't find it too heavy," said Mr. Digby.

" They are going to have quite a job counting the money up at the bank," I said.

" Aye, just tell them to take their time. And don't take the track past the crofts—keep clear o' that lot o' busybodies. Take the track which leads through the birch spinney. And don't get talking wi' anyone on the way to the bus stop."

" Very well," I said, already in a state of nerves at the thought of having to transport safely to the township such a large sum of money.

" If ye *should* meet up wi' one o' them sneakin' crofters and he asks ye what ye have in the basket, just tell him it's a few pounds o' new potatoes you're taking to the township to sell at the grocer's."

" Very well," I replied.

The basket, as I discovered soon enough, was terribly heavy. I hurried along with a beating heart and aching arms, occasionally casting a suspicious glance towards the crofts.

It was as I was walking through the birch spinney that I heard, to my horror, a voice call, " Guid morning! " just behind me. I said nothing but hurried on faster.

" Hie! Canna ye wait a wee while? "

Then I heard the sound of running footsteps and a young man appeared at my side.

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" I called out, ' Guid morning,' to ye. Dinna ye hear? "

" Good morning," I said.

" Are ye catching the bus to the township? "

" Yes, I am."

" So am I. I'll take that basket from ye. It looks heavy from the way you are walking along."

" Oh, it's not heavy! " And I clutched the handle with all my strength.

I had taken a surreptitious glance at the young man. He appeared honest enough—but appearances are often deceptive. I could not afford to take any chances with the load I was carrying.

" Here, gie that to me," he insisted. " I'll carry it for ye." And he seized hold of the handle and dragged the basket from me.

" Please give it back! " I said desperately, making a final attempt to regain it.

" Come on. We must hurry or we'll miss the bus. My, you've certainly got a load under that cloth—what is it? "

" Potatoes," I said firmly.

" Potatoes! " He looked at me as though I were overdue for a session with a psychiatrist.

" New potatoes . . ."

" Potatoes wouldn't be that heavy."

He dug a finger at the checked cloth under which lay the precious sack. " It feels more like doubloons—certainly not potatoes," he said with a laugh.

I shuddered at the nearness of his guess.

" Look," I said desperately, " I've undertaken a job for the old tinker couple and they don't want me to let out what it is."

" I see. But they've no right to gie ye a load this weight. Where will you be taking it to when you reach the township? I'll gie you a hand there."

" To the bank," I replied thoughtlessly.

" To the bank. Then it *is* money."

" Please!"

" How much is under the cloth—d'ye ken? "

" I haven't the faintest idea," I replied, " except that it's a goodly sum."

" I'll say it is. Don't worry; I won't say anything to the other crofters about it. We've all been wondering these past few days why it is you're staying wi' an old tinker couple like them. Tinkers are not the sort o' people you can trust. One thing about that old pair, they keep more or less to themselves. We don't want too many o' that sort about the place."

We reached the stop about half a minute before the bus. In spite of my previous anxiety about the young crofter accompanying

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me, I now felt rather glad of his presence. It would be a relief to have someone go with me to the bank and get the money passed safely over the counter.

On alighting from the bus, we made straight for the bank. I handed the slip of paper Mr. Digby had given me to a clerk.

My newfound companion left in order to attend to some affairs of his own, and I sat down while the counting commenced. The clerk untied the bag and extracted a handful of notes and coins, giving me a none too friendly look as he did so.

An hour passed and he was still counting. The looks he now flung at me were positively murderous. Whenever a dearth of other customers permitted, another clerk joined him and they carried on the counting together. Notes and heaps of coins were piled up on the counter, but still the sack was not empty.

" Can I come back after lunch? " I asked tentatively.

" You sit there till we've finished counting," the clerk snapped, " then you sign a receipt."

I sat.

Some two hours later the sackful of notes and coins had been totted up, and I signed a receipt for the sum of five hundred and ninety-three pounds, sixteen shillings and threepence halfpenny which was to be entered to the old tinker's account.

" And don't come in here again with another sack full of money," said the clerk.

" I can assure you I won't," I said.

I walked outside with a sigh of thankfulness that my task had been finally completed.

After a light snack, I did some shopping, took a quick look round the township, then met my companion for high tea.

As I buttered a slice of toast and started off on a plate of haddock cooked in milk, he asked, " How much cash was there? "

I told him.

" Whew! " he exclaimed. " Fancy that old tinker couple saving up a big sum like that."

It was quite late when we got back—somewhere around nine o'clock. Even so, I was somewhat surprised when I arrived at the croft to find it in darkness and the old couple already gone to bed. I called out to them, but not a sound came from the bedroom except an occasional snore. They had no doubt reckoned that my temper would not be at its best on my return from the township, and that it might be as well if we did not meet again till the following morning after a night's sleep had restored me to a more equable frame of mind. And in this they were right.

Over a breakfast of porridge, bacon and eggs, they thanked me warmly for having done the job.

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"There is one thing I think I ought to tell you, Mr. Digby," I said, and related how the young crofter had carried the basket to the bank and knew that the sack had contained a large sum of money.

The old couple appeared startled for a moment.

"And when the money was counted, did ye tell him how much there was?" Mr. Digby asked.

"Yes, I did," I confessed. "He was naturally curious and asked me how much the sack had contained."

"Well," he said after a pause, "as the money's in the bank now I don't suppose it matters."

He gave a slow smile, and I had the feeling that he was secretly pleased that the crofters would know that an old tinker couple like themselves had managed to save through the years such a large sum of money.

Soon after breakfast, I fastened the straps of my rucksack and, waving good-bye to them, set off for Fort William.

The area round about Fort William is much frequented by tinkers and it did not take me long to find out that a group of them was encamped a few miles from the town. But it is one thing to know where tinkers are camped and another to get yourself on sufficiently good terms with them so that they welcome you among them as a fellow traveller.

I bought a supply of food in the town, then walked back on my tracks to where I had been told their bothies were pitched. In the north the tents are called bothies and in the south tans.

I came to a lane down which was bicycling a farm worker and I asked him the whereabouts of the tinkers. He pointed towards a clump of hawthorns in the distance.

"Behind them trees, that's where they're pitched. It's about a ten minute walk from the farmhouse."

I walked slowly towards the spot the man had indicated. Soon I came to a narrow stream, the banks of which were dotted with furze bushes. Across the water I could see that the tinkers had pitched two bothies by the side of their carts, and their horses were grazing untethered in the field. There were two women and some children on the camp site. They soon caught sight of me and stood motionless, watching me approach. I did not go up to them direct. I pretended to be quite oblivious of their presence and started to erect my small nylon tent a short way from the stream in the lee of some furze bushes. The tent erected, I pumped the Primus, filled my kettle from the stream, and started to prepare high tea.

It was not long before two children—a boy and a girl—came

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wandering over. Their faces showed that look peculiar to the travelling folk when meeting up with a stranger, which expresses neither friendliness nor hostility but a quietly watchful state.

Having stood staring at me for some seconds, the boy said bluntly, "What are ye doing here?"

"Cooking high tea," I replied.

"Aye. But why've ye come and pitched right near us?"

"Near you?" I said. "I'm nowhere near you. You're right the other side of the stream. I think this is a very pleasant place to set up my tent, that's all."

"Are ye going to work on the farm?" asked the girl.

"Maybe."

"D'ye always cook on that wee stove?" she questioned again.

"Not always. Sometimes I cook on an open fire, like you folks. But I'm not going to the bother of lighting one this evening."

"So ye're going to sleep tonight in that wee tent?" said the boy.

"Yes, I am."

"I reckon it won't keep the rain out if it starts coming down."

"That's just where you're wrong," I said, "because it does."

I opened a bag of sweets and put one into my mouth. They both asked for one and I gave them a single sweet apiece. As they now considered the ice broken between us, they set to inspecting my belongings. I did not take my eyes off them a moment, for I knew full well that if I did several bits of my belongings might find their way across the stream. Pilfering is not uncommon among some groups of tinkers.

"What are your names?" I asked.

"She's Janie and I'm Brian."

"And what's your family name?"

"Taff."

I pointed to the bothies. "Are you all one family over there?"

"Nay. There's me and Janie, Ma and Dad. And we travel wi' our cousins. They're called Mackintosh and they've a boy called Leslie and a wee bairn."

"How old is Leslie?"

"Round about eight."

A woman appeared on the scene. "You pitching here?" she asked.

"For a couple of nights."

"That's our Ma," said the girl.

This woman was reserved and far from friendly, and I guessed she strongly resented my presence. Her dark hair fell to her shoulders, and she was dressed in a cotton blouse and an old flowered cotton skirt. I noted that two of her fingers were

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bandaged with strips of dirty linen. Curiosity is something tinkers understand, for they are not lacking in a good streak of it themselves, though they nevertheless are often resentful of it in others. I pointed to her hand and asked, "Have you cut your fingers?"

"I cut them opening a tin," she replied.

"Then I hope you put some iodine on the cuts; tins can be very poisonous," I said in the manner of one who has passed a course in nursing. "What sort of tin was it?" I asked, stirring a mess of baked beans in my pan.

She appeared a little uneasy. "It was just a tin o' baked beans like those you're warming up, only they were in tomato sauce."

"Um . . . Still, there's nothing to worry about if you *did* dab the cuts with iodine."

"Is that medicines in that case over there?" she asked, indicating my first-aid case which had been dropped on the grass by the children with various other pieces of my belongings.

"Yes—medicine, bandages, scissors, and so on," I replied.

"Perhaps ye could let me have a bandage," she said. "This one could do wi' a change."

"Certainly."

She stripped off the dirty bandages, washed the cuts in the stream, then I applied a little iodine and put clean bandages on her fingers. She and the children appeared to enjoy this little first-aid session.

By the time the two men returned from the farm, I was on good terms with both the women and the children.

The following morning, at the invitation of the men, I moved my tent and belongings over to their side of the field. Now I was welcome to their fire as well as their company. The two men set off to the farm after an early breakfast while the women did chores about the camp. Then I and the younger woman, Brenda Mackintosh, walked to the farmhouse to inquire whether the farmer's wife could give us any jobs for the day. This was the period of odd jobs before the picking season got under way.

The only job the farmer's wife could give us was plucking fowls; peculiarly distasteful work, so far as I am concerned. The two of us sat on wooden chairs under which had been spread newspapers, and we plucked and plucked bunches of feathers from the birds. They were going to be taken into Fort William next day for sale. At the end of the morning the farmer's wife gave us each ten shillings and told us that there would be no further work until the morrow.

This tinker woman, Brenda, was not so good-looking as the other. She was heavily built, with a round plump face and black

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permed hair. But now that we had become acquainted I found her less aloof than the other.

"Where will ye be going when ye leave here?" she asked me as we walked back to camp over the short turf, out of which sprang the curled fronds of young bracken.

"I shall be making for England, the west of England," I said. "I'll be spending summer and autumn there picking, maybe the winter too."

"Will ye be travelling alone?"

"No, with Romany friends," and I added: "I've just come from Wester Ross where I've been staying with an old tinker couple called Connor and Maggie Digby. Have you heard of them?"

She shook her head.

"They only travel in summer now," I said. "Before I cross the border, I should like to spend a short spell travelling with tinkers. Just a couple of days maybe. Do you think I might come along with you for a while when you leave here? I'm willing to go hawking and pay my own way, of course."

"I don't know," she said, "but I'll ask the men if you like."

"Thank you."

And there I left the matter. I had no intention of bringing it up again. If they were agreeable to my proposition they would soon let me know, otherwise they would not mention it and we would part as though I had not spoken of my wish to travel with them.

Brenda's husband, Spencer, was a tall burly man, slow of speech but very quick with his hands. As we sat round the fire after tea that day he joined in the conversation only occasionally but busied himself carving pegs with his penknife from lengths of stripped alder. Having dexterously carved one, he would toss it into a wicker basket by his side. Neither of the two couples, as I soon found out, had been officially married. Like most of their kind, they apparently looked on official ceremonies with indifference.

All the members of this group, with the exception of Ellen Taff, the redhaired woman, had been born in bothies and had never known anything but the travellers' life. Ellen's early life, so her husband Forsyth told me, had been a little different from theirs. He had first met her when he was picking in the Morven district. Her parents were both tinkers but had "settled," and it seemed that Ellen was destined to lead a householder's existence. In fact, she had already accepted the proposal of a farmer's boy to become his wife. Then Forsyth appeared on the scene, much to her parents' dismay, and proposed to her after only a few days'

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acquaintanceship. She had accepted him, and without a word to the parents, who had done their best to keep him away from their daughter, they had slipped off and got wedded according to tinker custom, out in the open fields, with an old tinker performing the tying of hands ceremony. I was to witness this ceremony for myself later that year when a gipsy girl I knew called Thurzie was married to a young Romany.

"And have you ever wished to go back to the settled life?" I asked Ellen.

"Nay, never," she replied. These were the first words she had spoken, so far as I could recollect, during the whole evening. She continued in a low voice, "I reckon that I had always wanted to lead the travelling life because I guessed it would be the only life to make me happy." And she gave one of her rare but beautiful smiles.

I had occasionally seen this smile before in Scotland. It expresses, in the slow movement of the lips, the qualities of gentleness, pride, a depth of experience, and a certain mystery. There is nothing shallow or superficial about it; it is not the smile of a flirt or coquette. I have seen this smile again on women's faces in India, and on the upturned lips of ancient Athenian statues. Perhaps the women of Greece still smile in this way.

I said good night and walked over to my tent. I undressed, sponged my face and hands with a flannel, and got into my sleeping-bag. By the light of a torch, balanced on top of the rucksack, I started to read a book of Hans Andersen's fairytales. A slight noise outside the tent made me glance towards the opening and I saw that two hands were holding the flap apart and two pairs of eyes were looking in at me.

"It's just us," came Janie's voice, on seeing that she and her brother had been spotted.

"What do you want?" I asked.

The flap was drawn more widely apart.

"We just want to hae another look at that crystal ball o' yours, Reena," said the boy, using the name I am called among travellers.

They had clearly been delving into my rucksack when I was absent, for I kept this ball right at the bottom and had not taken it out since my arrival.

"When did you first see this ball?" I asked.

"This morning," Brian replied, "when ye were over at the farm."

The pair had now been joined by their cousin Leslie, and the three sat crouched outside in the dark watching me intently.

"You mean," I said severely, "that you've been looking over

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Drawings by Susan Einzig

my belongings while I was out. Would you please not do that again. You've no right to."

"Aye," they murmured.

"Can we come in now," Janie asked, "and hae a look at it?"

"Very well," I said.

Removing the torch from the rucksack, I looked inside. My belongings were in a state of topsy-turvy.

"I'll be mad if you go looking through my things again," I said, extracting the ball.

They said nothing but sat on their haunches, waiting expectantly. The small tent was full to overflowing and it was hardly possible to move an elbow.

I held the ball in my hand. It was a Victorian children's toy, about the size of a small orange in which a little scene had been set. This scene was of a village along whose streets walked a man and woman, arm-in-arm, dressed in the clothes of the period; in front of them walked a tiny dog. An old man, bent over a stick, was coming towards the couple. The village was surrounded by rugged mountains dotted with pine trees. It might have been a scene from any district hereabouts. When the ball was shaken a snowstorm whirled, and for a while everything would be blotted

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out until the snow slowly came to rest again on mountains, roofs, and streets.

I had possessed this pretty toy for many years, and I would often shake it and watch the descending snow. If I should be working in a town the glass ball had the gift of transporting me to the countryside. To call it a toy seemed hardly the right word, for it had often proved itself to be something of a magic crystal, setting my imagination free from whatever surroundings I happened to be in. And I often noted that it has a fascination for others, grown-ups and children alike, besides myself.

I handed them the ball and the three of them played with it happily for about an hour while I continued to read my book. They made up stories about the little people and the dog, and gazed into its depths like fortune-tellers trying to glimpse the future.

" I'm going to sleep now," I said.

They handed back the ball, then, crawling from the tent, ran over to the bothies.

The next morning the two men decided to move on that day, and started to pull up the curved stakes over which the canvas had been flung. Presently Forsyth came over to me.

" We're moving today," he said. " If ye'd like to travel wi' us for a while you're welcome."

" Thanks," I said, and started to dismantle my own tent and pack away my belongings.

The two horses were caught and harnessed to the shafts of the carts. Everything was then piled in. Travelling with tinkers in an open cart can be hard when the weather is bad. But on the morning we set off, although the sky was grey and the breeze somewhat chilly, there was a pleasant freshness and clarity in the atmosphere and the countryside could be seen for miles around. The carts rattled off down the lane. The men did the driving while the women and children were split up between the two carts. It was only after we had been going down a lonely country road for what must have been a good half hour that I suddenly thought to ask where we were heading.

" You're all right," Forsyth said over his shoulder. " We're heading south towards Glencoe way. We'll be camping out in the open tonight."

By which he meant, I gathered, that we would not be camping in the vicinity of a farm or clachan.

The carts were rattling down roads well off the main highways. The horses' hoofs flicked up stones from the unsurfaced road. Over to our left rose Ben Nevis and the wild mountain country.

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At midday we made a brief halt. A roadside fire was lit, and the kettle brought to the boil for cups of tea. But no cooking was done. We ate bread, cheese, and slices of cake.

That afternoon we came to a small clachan where a jumble sale was being held in the hall. On seeing the people going in, the tinker women decided at once to go in too, and look over the goods for sale. They hurried across with the children. I stayed with the men by the carts. We had hardly halted there a minute when a policeman came pedalling up on a bicycle and, seeing the tinkers, got off and asked, " Will you be moving on soon? "

" In a short while," Spencer replied.

" Are you trading round here? "

" Nay. The women have just gone inside there to see if they can get some clothes cheap."

" Where are you making for? "

" Glencoe way."

" I see."

He mounted his bicycle and rode off.

It is extraordinary what the traveller today has to put up with from officialdom, the personal questioning and so on, should he halt his cart for only a brief while. Yet I do not forget—and neither do the travellers—that in Britain, although officialdom is doing everything it possibly can to make travellers " settle " and generally make their lives difficult, our native nomads have not been persecuted, murdered, or forced into factories, which they consider as prisons, which has been the case in many other European countries. The traveller in Britain has a greater degree of freedom than in many other parts of the world, and in spite of much grumbling, he is at heart grateful he was born here.

The women and children came out of the hall, their arms and baskets filled with a conglomeration of old clothing and shoes.

" We'll try on some o' these later," said Brenda, holding up a cardigan to see whether there were any moth-holes which had escaped her eye in the hall. " Anything that turns out nae guid we'll chop later."

The word " chop " is used by both tinkers and gipsies and means to exchange or barter something for other goods.

Among the bargains they had just acquired was a large straw hat, almost Edwardian in its size, round which was a large blue velvet bow pinned to which was a squashed yellow rose. Ellen put the hat on her head.

" Whatever did ye want to go and buy that for? " asked Forsyth in the tone of voice used by many a husband whose wife has just purchased some outrageous piece of headgear.

" I liked it," she replied. " We can always chop it later."

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"We! Ye'll chop it yerself. I wouldn't be seen dead wi' a thing like that."

But, strangely enough, Ellen with her untidy dark red hair looked beautiful wearing that battered straw hat. Old-fashioned though it was and fit only for the dustbin, it nevertheless suited her and with her woman's instinct she had sensed this. Unfortunately, there would be few opportunities when she could wear it and it would doubtless change hands again in a few days' time.

The horses clip-clopped at a slow pace down the road. The grey dusk of evening shortened the view. A flock of starlings flew by.

"This place will do," Spencer called from the leading cart, reining in the horse.

The carts were parked on a wide grass verge which bordered a pinewood. The animals were taken from the shafts and firmly tethered. Then the bothies and my tent were set up under the pine branches. A fire was lit on a sandy patch of ground and the iron crane set over it, a cooking pot suspended from the hooked portion. It was still light enough to see the yellow clumps of primroses growing among the undergrowth and a few white heads of anemones or wind-flowers. By a blackthorn tree, whose twigs still showed only a trace of green leaf, was a furze bush on which were blooming several bright yellow flowers which smelled pleasantly of apricots. I thought of hot summer days out on moorlands covered with "the ever-blossoming furze" bushes, when the scent from the flowers had been quite overpowering.

"One of the things I like best about the woods in Britain," I said, on returning to the fire from which thick, heavy plumes of smoke were ascending skywards, "is that except under certain trees, there is always plenty of undergrowth, moss, flowers, and so on."

"Well o' course," said Forsyth.

"That's far from being the case in many eastern countries," I said. "In Morocco there are cork forests stretching for acres and there is hardly a blade of grass under their branches. And you can motor for miles over the countryside—days sometimes—without seeing more vegetation than a few scraggy bushes."

"Then I never want to go to Morocco when I grow up," said Leslie, chaining one of the long-legged dogs to the cart.

We had meat and vegetables for supper that evening and, of course, the inevitable cups of tea.

How peaceful it is under the pine branches! I thought, as I sat for a while outside my tent before going to sleep. It was

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weeks now since I had read a newspaper or listened to the radio. I wanted only to live my own life which, as I realised from my very early years, was set in a totally different direction from the lives of most people in the class in which I had been born. Not that I had any desire to attach myself to any other class; I wished to free myself from all artificial barriers.

It was because of this determination that, in early adulthood, I started to lead a secret life. I began to correspond with foreigners, some of whom I had met for brief periods when they visited Britain, and this correspondence had by now reached large proportions. And I started to travel, first at home, later overseas. Thus began my life with the gipsies, my secret life which ran parallel with a more conventional life at an art school and in various offices. To me, of course, the secret life was by far the more important, but they remained linked, these two lives, and I never managed to break free of the one and live the other entirely, hard though I tried. I was to experience the dual existence of a slave (for town and office life were like slavery to me) and a free being during those years: to plunge continually from one state to the other. How does one emancipate oneself? The question was never out of my mind for long. I heard people in London speak of freedom often enough, but the gipsies I lived with were people who never mentioned the word freedom, who perhaps in their whole lives had hardly given it a thought, but who were nevertheless relatively free beings, able to communicate fully and freely with others, unselfconscious and spontaneous in their behaviour.

I never accepted the periods of slavery in office and bedsitter, yet I was not able to lead my other life except in comparatively brief stretches. Circumstances and sometimes my own desires continually hauled me back to a humdrum and narrow existence: money, a taste for the cultural side of town life, my talent for writing, which at one moment I would see as my greatest barrier to freedom and at another as the means of attaining it—financial freedom, at least. All these things would bring me back sooner or later to the office desk or drawing-board, until I kicked over the traces and set off once more to lead the free life of a traveller.

The bedsitter and the gipsy wagon became symbolic to me. The one represented prison, the other freedom. I had set out on a quest that was to lead me into many byways and highways, a quest not without importance, though the goal was intangible. Through living the simple open air life of a nomad I found I was in touch with deeper levels of existence, and so my days passed by more harmoniously and vividly and I saw nature with clearer eyes...

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I travelled with these tinkers for five days. I went hawking with the women, a basket filled with pegs and cheap jewellery over my arm. And I shopped with them too in the little country stores of lonely clachans. My accentless voice, and perhaps something about my looks—my skin was untanned then—always made the shopkeepers glance at me in surprise, and an inquiring look would spread across their faces as though they longed to ask me what I was doing in the company of tinkers.

Later, when my complexion had darkened a little, I was often taken to be a gipsy by the gorgio fraternity just so long as I did not speak. People seeing me going along a village street with a basket over my arm or sitting in a cart with other travellers never took me for anyone but a Romany. But I had only to enter a shop and ask for a packet of tea or inquire of a village woman whether she wanted any pegs, and the fact that I was not a born and bred traveller would be immediately apparent to them, and arouse their curiosity as to why I should have attached myself to a group of tinkers or gipsies.

One morning, not many miles from Ballachulish, we started to cross a moorland dotted with pine trees and furze bushes in the middle of which was a crossroads. The tinkers were taking a road which led westwards. They were making for a farm where they had been given work in the past. I was taking the road leading south. I climbed down from the cart and my belongings were handed to me.

"Good-bye," I called as the horses moved off down the straight stretch of road.

"Good-bye," they called back. "See ye again one day, maybe."

I sat down at the crossing and waited for some vehicle to come by and hitch a lift on it. It was quite possible I would have to wait an hour or so as traffic was infrequent over these lonely moors. As I sat there, something made me undo the straps of my rucksack and feel inside for the glass ball. My fingers pried here and there seeking it, but it was no good. I knew that however long I searched, my fingers would not touch the glass again.

Perhaps that Victorian glass ball is still with those tinker children, or perhaps having enjoyed it for a little while they chopped it for something else. I do not begrudge it to them. And I like to think of them, pitched at some camping-ground, staring at the little scene and watching the snow whirl, as I used to do sometimes in bygone years.

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From "A Time from the World," by Rowena Farre, to be published in early November by Hutchinson

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NOISES OFF

" Not to worry, old man," he said,
in his clipped English way. " All fixed."

BY J. ROGER BAKER

SUCH chaos on the eve of an important first night was something even Gino Ferrando the company manager had never experienced in a lifetime devoted to opera. The final run-through had been the most hair-raising fourteen hours Gino had ever spent.

" Three leading sopranos in one opera." Gino almost wept, sinking deeper into his chair and his gloom. " It is too much. Much too much too much. Mozart should have known better. One soprano we can handle. Two is always touch and go. But three. Ah, three is *impossible.*" His lined features became obscured behind clouds of depression and cigar smoke.

Down on the stage they were still wrestling with the last scene of this all-star *Don Giovanni.* Things had gone from dangerous to disastrous. Donna Anna had told Donna Elvira that with a voice like hers she should be in the chorus. Donna Elvira had retorted that with manners like hers Donna Anna should be selling fish, and anyway wasn't that what she did when she was supposed to be resting.

The third soprano, a pretty little thing, had stopped in mid duet with the leading baritone to announce that his breath smelled of garlic. There was a strong rumour that the tenor was in tears.

" Too much temperament," the whisper went round. From the wardrobe mistress mending a tear in Donna Anna's second act black velvet, to the man in charge of the trapdoor, the story was the same: " Too much temperament."

It was a slight excuse. Everyone claimed a certain amount of temperament as a right. But it was so catching. Even the bass, usually so placid he made Mephistopheles in *Faust* sound like St. Francis of Assisi preaching to a couple of stray doves, had taken off his boots and refused to put them on again until a larger size was found. Three stagehands got down to a game of poker and thought about overtime, while the conductor and producer snarled at each other over what one could and could not do in

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three bars of music. The press officer had come out in a rash.

"What shall we do?" Gino moaned to his designer, an imperturbable Englishman called Simon Carter. Gino usually treated his designers as so much dust, but Simon was the only member of the company not in hysterics or sulks.

"Tomorrow night means so much to everyone, to Italian opera itself. We have the grand gala opening in London; the advance publicity has been unprecedented; I just dare not face the backers. It will be a disaster, complete, absolute." He buried his head in his hands, a conventional study of despair.

Simon groped for a word of consolation, but found himself unable to help. He was young and said to be brilliant, but he had no experience of this sort of fiasco. His last commission had been an English drawing-room comedy written for seven elderly actresses to make a come-back. They had been very sweet, and sent each other roses before the first night.

But this *Don Giovanni* meant a lot to Simon too. He went out quietly, chewing his thumb.

The next morning Simon reached the theatre early. The foyer was already a mass of flowers. It was understood that a Very Royal Person who had never been to an opera before in his entire life was coming to the gala performance. Gino was in an acute state of nerves. The morning papers drifted round his feet. All of them had given staggering publicity, one going a bit too far by saying it was the most important operatic event since the prewar Gigli season, which was inaccurate but nice.

Simon patted Gino diffidently on the shoulder. "Not to worry old man," he said in his clipped English way. "All fixed."

Gino looked uncomprehendingly. "I've told the singers about Fulmayer," added Simon, blushing slightly.

"Fulmayer? Who is this Fulmayer?" Gino was bemused.

"You didn't know, either—but I thought you must. Harry D. Fulmayer, the film producer, one of the biggest in Hollywood, is coming to the show tonight—talent spotting."

"What! Gran dio; this makes everything worse, much worse, I—"

Simon interrupted. "Now listen, Gino. Last night I went round the dressing-rooms and spoke to each singer alone. It was horrible." He shuddered in retrospection. "I had to listen to everyone's tale of woe and sympathise. Then I told them all, making it appear a special confidence to each one, that Fulmayer would be in the audience tonight. I also told them that he was working on a lavish production of Verdi's life story and that he would be here to see if any of our singers would be suitable to make a screen test."

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Gino's mouth opened and closed. Then, "But is this true?" he asked.

"Oh, perfectly," Simon assured him. "Who knows, he might ask you to be operatic adviser."

"Magnificent!" Gino was elated. Then he slumped again. "But the show. It is going to be *terrible*—"

"No." Simon managed to inject more assurance into his voice than he actually felt. "I told the cast to forget private worries for a while... A Hollywood contract, I pointed out, could do nothing but good for the company and for each of them. I think it'll work. Donnas Anna and Elvira are here already, being charming all round."

Gino gave a fairly good imitation of a squib lit at both ends. He pushed Simon into a chair, thrust a cigar into his mouth, and all but shattered the house telephone giving orders for coffee and cognac.

It was two minutes to the curtain, the theatre empty, and the audience still in the bars looking each other over. A celebrated ballerina had already stalked up and down the grand staircase three times, cutting a noted poetess at each descent. It was all very rewarding. Bar sales soared.

Half an hour later the auditorium slowly filled. The stalls glittered, white shirtfronts, bare shoulders, and the odd tiara throwing into high relief the shabby sports coat and green shirt of a particularly defiant young novelist.

Backstage, Gino went round wishing his cast luck. The atmosphere was cool, but tranquil. Even the arrival in Donna Anna's dressing-room of a bouquet of ivy leaves and garlic was passed off with a light laugh.

Gino joined Simon and the producer in their stage box. Six seats in the fourth row were being occupied by a pile of sable, emeralds, and bald heads that eventually sorted themselves out into Harry D. Fulmayer and party. The lights dimmed.

"Is that your friend?" whispered Gino, indicating the group.

"That's Fulmayer, yes," said Simon, adding, "he is not my friend. I don't know the man at all..."

The performance was a delight. The singers behaved beautifully, were almost visibly polite to each other. The Don virtually bowed his own servant off; the three sopranos cast an aura of sweetness and winsome smiles, and were so busy trying not to upstage each other that the action at times seemed to take place against the backdrop.

"It worked, it worked." Gino was ecstatic with relief. "I don't care whether we get this Hollywood contract or not; the

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performance was magnificent. I shall invite Mr.—Fulmayer?—to the party afterwards." He joined in the swelling applause. The third soprano was actually moving back a couple of paces to allow the tenor a solo call. You could see his bottom lip trembling.

At the party it was all champagne and congratulation. The sopranos posed prettily for cameramen and were seen chatting amiably together. Harry D. Fulmayer was a great success. A large fat man with a large fat voice and seven deadly chins, he devoted an exactly equal amount of time to each singer.

"I've enjoyed this evening of opera a great deal, a very great deal," he boomed pompously. "It has been my intention for a number of years now to make a really great moving picture of a really great composer of opera. I refer, of course, to Giuseppe Verdi." He had adopted his conference manner; his voice carried across the room. It would have carried through a four-inch brick wall plastered on both sides. Conversation died as more people gathered to listen.

"You know the sort of thing that goes over strong with the great movie-going public," he went on, "plenty of backstage stuff, lots of drama, sobs and chuckles, the strain of first nights—all this plus spectacularly mounted excerpts from Verdi's greatest works—*Aida*, *La Traviata*, *The Flying Dutchman*—" He paused, knowing something had gone wrong somewhere, but decided to ignore it. "All filmed in full colour and Process H.D.F. 6."

He warmed to his theme. "I had hoped, very sincerely, to ask genuine opera singers to play this film. It would give it an air of authenticity. Harry D. Fulmayer studios are world famous for their authenticity."

He had the attention of the whole room now. "You saw *Theseus and the Bull*? No. Never mind. Every costume in that film was an authentic copy of a Cretan fresco." His chins wobbled happily in reminiscence.

"So one of the reasons I came along tonight, apart—" he beamed, half bowed towards Gino—"from my very great admiration for the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, one of the reasons I came along was to see for myself what a really great first night would be like." Interest quickened. Fulmayer sipped his champagne.

"And I received a surprise. Yes, sir. One big eye-opener. It seems to me that I can't feature real opera singers in this film at all. Of course, I shall dub in their voices." There was a sudden stillness. "I have been having a little chat with your gifted designer, Mr. Simon Carter here." Simon started to edge away. "Now he tells me that this idea we laymen have—" a

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deprecatory laugh in which one or two sycophantically joined—" that opera singers are bundles of temperament, is a myth. I asked Mr. Carter, man to man, how rehearsals went. And he tells me this production sailed along as smoothly as Alice Faye in *Hello, 'Frisco, Hello*—remember that? a great film—and sure thing, I have never seen a smoother first night or met a more tranquil crowd connected with a theatrical enterprise before. You're a lucky man, Signor Ferrando. If ever you want to see what temperament is like, then you just drop in on one of my script conferences. Cut a word and they throw things."

He turned to the assembled cast and threw one arm out in a grand gesture. " You are all very charming, very sweet people. But it is temperament the public expects: its opera singers must be full of *temperament*, and I cannot disappoint my public."

Donna Anna was breathing heavily; Donna Elvira's smile curdled to a grin; the tenor's eyes were definitely dewy. Simon was about to drift casually doorwards when he felt a heavy hand on his arm. It was Fulmayer, and his words cut across the room.

" Mr. Carter," he said. " I was really impressed with those sets of yours for tonight's little show. Now, my Verdi film will include scenes from at least a dozen of his operas, and if you have the time, I would like you to do all the designing. Look in tomorrow morning and we'll sign you up . . ."

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ON BOARD NOAH'S ARK

By LUDWIG BEMELMANS

I GOT up early. One can usually tell the absence of the owner of a ship—the crew is lolling about in deckchairs and, in the case of the *Iphigenia*, unshaven, in dirty fatigue clothes. Usually the air around boats is rugged with tar, wood, varnish, and marine paint smells. The *Iphigenia* was bathed in a cloud of garlic, as revolting as a Marseillais breathing at you.

The captain told me that the owners of the *Iphigenia* had left for a visit to Venice. They were waiting for their return and then would proceed along the coast to Civitavecchia, Naples, and Capri.

The captain spat into the water after giving this information and walked away so as not to have to answer any more questions.

The *Arche de Noé* was shining, her decks scrubbed, her flags flying. René started the motor and asked his father to hoist the anchor. We started past the bows of the big yachts, towards the anchor, but there was some difficulty and René backed up. We tried again to go forward; we went left; we went right; we went in circles, but we could not lift the anchor. René decided that it might be easier after some of the big boats left; so we paid out cable and went back to our berth.

About eight o'clock the big boats began to stir. At nine, the *Shiraga* was ready to go. Its immense cranes lifted the gangway aboard, then the motorboat. The captain in full dress, with a gold-crested cap visor, issued orders. The anchor chain moved through the hawsehole as a sailor stood by with a hose, washing the chain free of mud. It was big enough to hold an ocean liner. Suddenly the chain stopped. The gold-braided captain gave another order and the crane, straining, lifted something out of the water that looked as if someone had been knitting a cablestitch sweater of chains.

A black-hulled four-master with a British flag and a third ship,

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In Portofino harbour—en fête for the regatta—Bemelmans, in his new role as yachtsman, is aboard his beloved, ancient boat, *Arche de Noé* moored alongside the magnificent yacht *Shiraga*.

the *Iphigenia*, tried to move. But both were unable to lift anchor; it became clear that all their anchor chains were entangled.

I rowed out to watch the confusion. Luckily, I had not painted the name of my boat on the dinghy. The little Maresciallo came up in his nutshell and gave commands through a megaphone. The captain of the *Shiraga* answered through an electric speaking-horn. Others began shouting and finally someone screamed in Italian, " That dirty little old boat there—the black one with the French name—that one is responsible for the whole mess."

The Maresciallo rowed over and questioned René, who has a temper, and immediately there was an argument. It was ten now, and Signor Piaggio appeared on the bridge beside his captain. He announced that he would telephone to Genoa for frogmen to untangle the mess. The Maresciallo ordered the *Arche de Noé* to proceed to the centre of things. Sailors from various ships were diving to try to undo the knots of iron; they came up shaking their heads.

The crane lowered Signor Piaggio's tender, and Signor Piaggio and his captain were taken to the *Arche de Noé*, where they pleaded with René, but he shook his head, scowled, and said, " Non, certainement non."

At one o'clock the frogmen from Genoa arrived, donned their gear, and descended.

Out in the beautiful bay of Santa Margherita the regatta had long since started; the sails were over near Rapallo. René stood with folded arms on the deck of the *Arche de Noé* and called the captain of the *Shiraga* the same names he was called, insulting his Italian parentage.

The flags on the *Arche de Noé* are on the mast, with the pennant of the Yacht Club de France—red, white, and blue with a star—up top; then to starboard below, a small flag of the country we are visiting, in this case Italian; and my flag to port—a pennant three-quarters black and the rest red. The American flag, which is supposed to be flown at the stern, was always taken in when we were in port, because the gangplank was at the stern and there was a danger of someone's stepping on the flag if the wind carried it across. Therefore everyone assumed that the *Arche de Noé*, with its name and its French crew, was a French boat. The Maresciallo, standing his full four-and-a-half feet in his nutshell,

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called, "I shall blackball that dirty little French boat in every harbour of Italy."

By now I was sitting on the dock watching the frogmen; the owner of the *Shiraga* approached and I laughed. He was red in the face and he said, "I'm glad you are enjoying all this. You are lucky—you don't own a boat."

I said that I did.

"Well, how can you sit here and laugh?" He looked at me carefully and said, "We have met before."

I said, "Yes, at lunch in Eze-sur-Mer, at a villa called Fal d'Eze. You are Enrico Piaggio—"

"And you are some kind of writer?"

"Yes."

"This delay, caused by that dirty little French boat and its crazy captain, is costing me a fortune. I offered that captain anything to cut his chain, but he said, 'A French captain never cuts his chain or loses his anchor.'"

I said I thought the position taken by the French captain was admirable.

"Of course, this makes a very amusing story for you," said Signor Piaggio. "By the way, you are interested in food, if I remember correctly. There is a good restaurant right here. Will you join me at lunch?"

The restaurant is called Pitosforo, and it is very good in all its departments and has a lovely view of the harbour. We were joined by an elderly, distinguished gentleman who was a cardinal.

"Go on—eat," said Signor Piaggio, "but please excuse me. I have no appetite. Everything is ruined on account of that dirty old tub."

The Maresciallo had summoned the skippers of all the boats, an engineer, and a salvage expert, and with a dripping frogman they came into the restaurant. The engineer had made a harbour chart on which the positions of the various yachts were indicated, their anchor chains, and their times of arrival. He announced his plan: "When the water clears, the *Iphigenia*, which arrived last, will move to mid harbour; then the *Shiraga* moves to here, the *Arche de Noé* advances to here, and the *Shiraga* backs up and is free to go to sea. Then the *Iphigenia* goes to starboard and the *San Giorgio* moves here. And so on, boat after boat, in order, as each anchor chain clears."

"I hope it works," said a waiter.

"Of course it will work," said the engineer. "A diver with a telephone will direct it from below, I myself from above."

Because of the local traffic in the harbour and the muddiness of the water, it was decided to put off the operation until morning.

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The day was a total loss already. The engineer rolled up his plan and left.

The head waiter told Signor Piaggio that the divers and the engineers were hungry. "Of course, of course, feed them. Give them anything they want. What's the difference?" said the great industrialist. "My weekend is ruined anyway. Every hour of this costs me millions of lire."

The cardinal folded his hands and, pointing to Piaggio, who was leaning over the terrace, said to me, "He can easily afford it. You know about him? He invented the Vespa."

When Piaggio came back I said, "You invented the Vespa?"

"Yes, I did. I got the idea like *this* one day." He snapped his fingers.

The cardinal said, "He brought happiness to millions of people."

"And made millions miserable," I said. "Is it true that the Americans dumped tons of nuts and bolts after the war, and that you bought this junk for a song and made the Vespa?"

Signor Piaggio stabbed his fork at me. "That was funny once, but it doesn't amuse me any more. Waiter, some Parmesano, please, and open the bottle."

The cardinal, who was eating green olives stuffed with anchovies and drinking a Negrone with a slice of lemon, stuck his napkin in his collar and said, "Don't you like the Vespa?"

"No," I said, "I think there should be an open season on Vespas when anyone can shoot them. I loved Rome before the Vespa came. Since it appeared, I cannot sleep there. One reason I bought a boat was to get away from Vespas."

"Oh, you own a boat?"

"Yes, Signor Piaggio, I own that dirty little French boat there—the *Arche de Noé*."

"He is joking," said Piaggio to the cardinal. He could hardly get his words out for surprise.

"No, he is not," said the cardinal. "Waiter, bring some cheese and salad, and some fruit—some cherries."

But when Piaggio found his tongue he fell into a real Italian rage and left the table.

There is something very touching about Italians.

That evening as I sat on my boat, Signor Piaggio appeared with the cardinal, smiled a disarming Italian good evening, and said he was sorry he had insulted my boat. He asked permission to come aboard, and he put his arms around me. I apologised for my remarks about the Vespa, and he invited me to dinner on the *Shiraga*.

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Everything was excellent—the butler, the white carpets, air-conditioning, and the first good martini I had tasted since the Neapolitan bandits had drained my cellar. A very fine dinner and interesting conversation. The cardinal had a tremendous capacity for storytelling as well as food and drink, so much so that when he came to the point his eyes watered and he could barely speak from laughing.

Enrico Piaggio was equally entertaining. He had on board, he said, a new invention, not a Vespa—he laughed—but something to ride on the water—a new concept, propelled by jet. "Tomorrow, dear friend, before we undo the chains, I will let you try it out."

After dinner he accompanied me to my boat, with many wishes for a good night. "Caro Ludovico," he said, "sleep well. Adios." And to the *Arche de Noé*, he said, "Dear old boat, forgive me for calling you names."

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SOLUTION to WITS ON THEIR TOES on page 18

1. *One is a sugar-and-water-type medicine given by doctors to hypochondriac patients, the other a summerhouse commanding a view.*
2. *a. 18th century landscape gardener; b. 19th century American settler; c. in 1739, between England and Spain.*
3. *Mary Tudor, Henry VIII's sister, widow of Louis XII of France, later married the Duke of Suffolk.*
4. *a. The Houses of Parliament; b. Westminster Abbey.*
5. *a. Degas; b. Van Gogh; c. Salvador Dali; d. Lowry; e. le douanier Rousseau.*
6. *Professor Moriarty.*
7. *a. Arnold Bennett; b. James Joyce; c. Tolstoy; d. Sam Whiskers.*
8. *In 1882 a burlesque obituary in the "Sporting Times" commented on Australia's defeat of England, "the body will be cremated and the Ashes taken to Australia."*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 136

Across. 1, *Beat it.* 4, *Barbel.* 10, *Terrain.* 11, *In orbit.* 12 *Edam.* 13, *Lochs.* 14, *Onus.* 17, *Stiff sentence.* 18, *Short interval.* 23, *Orgy.* 24, *Hunch.* 25, *Emma.* 28, *Plateau.* 29, *Learner.* 30, *Elders.* 31, *Stocks.*

Down. 1, *Bother.* 2, *Abreast.* 3, *Ivan.* 5, *Avon.* 6, *Bubonic.* 7, *Latest.* 8, *Inconspicuous.* 9, *Fishing-tackle.* 15, *Afire.* 16, *Merry.* 19, *Haggard.* 20, *Almanac.* 21, *Couple.* 22, *Madras.* 26, *Tear.* 27, *Salt.*

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MR. ESPINSHADE

He was a man without a nickname

BY BERNARD SABATH

STRIDING with measured steps through the city's November fog, Macmurray Espinshade was an impressive sight. Observing his massive Chesterfield-coated figure, his distinguished homburg-hatted head as he passed beneath a street light, one might have guessed, correctly, that he was a man of taste and some importance. His floridly sensuous features contained a quivering sensitivity, particularly the large grey eyes. One might also have guessed from the upward tilt of his head that Macmurray Espinshade was rather aloof.

He was. For one thing, during his thirty-eight years no one had ever called him "Mac." His mother, back in the small Missouri town years ago, had always trilled his name, the syllables ringing through the air as she stood on the back steps of their tiny white clapboard house and sang across the backyards, "*Mac-mur-r-ray*, time for *din-n-ner!*"

His employees in the gift shop he managed would never have dared call him anything but Mr. Espinshade. Even the shop's owner, rich Mrs. Nestor, who visited Treasures & Rarities only once each season, had never attempted to establish any informality between herself and Macmurray.

Nor, for that matter, had Chloe Barrowes, the small, slightly fading, fortyish widow who had invited Macmurray to his weekly dinner tonight. It was Macmurray's intention to ask Chloe, tonight, to call him Mac from now on; and as he walked he anticipated her smile of pleasure at this relaxation of formality.

He had further plans which he would not reveal immediately; but the fact was that very soon he would favour Chloe by asking her to marry him. Her being a few years his senior didn't bother him; and he trusted she could overlook it, too. She would, inevitably, be delighted to escape the drudgery of the office-manager job she kept saying she liked and move into Macmurray's tasteful, perfectly ordered existence. She had probably, by this time, lost all hope of achieving a second marriage and would be ecstatic in her success; and he would be, he supposed, moderately happy too.

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Chloe need never know that, a few days ago, Dr. Gold had ordered Macmurray to change his diet habits. "Or else," he had ominously concluded.

Macmurray's grey eyes had opened wide, and he had asked in a strange, twisted voice, "Is it really that bad, Doctor?"

And Doctor Gold had replied, "It's *desperate*, Macmurray. You need sensible meals at home. Less fat, less sweets, absolutely no fried foods. And cut out this—er—gluttony of buying two quarts of chocolate ice-cream on the way home and immediately doing away with it—er—them. You hear?"

Macmurray heard distinctly, but for some inexplicable reason he found himself walking from the twilight outside Dr. Gold's building directly to Priam's, a fancy red and gold restaurant where the maître d' led him to his favourite spot—the table for two in the exact centre of the main dining-room.

Here, according to custom, Macmurray dawdled over his gloomy thoughts and three very dry martinis, a double order of French-fried shrimps with mayonnaise, an extra-large porterhouse steak, well buttered, and a giant mound of soufflèd potatoes.

Agnes, the blonde waitress whom he always tipped lavishly, remembered not to suggest a fresh vegetable or a salad but to bring plenty of hot rolls and jam; and with the dessert, a small side dish of whipped cream, and then two pint-sized silver pots of coffee. With his cup after well-sugared cup, it was Macmurray's habit to smoke imported cigarettes which he took from a showy gold case (Treasures & Rarities, $120; $60 wholesale) and lighted with a gold torch of a lighter (a gift from Mrs. Nestor; Treasures & Rarities, $100; $50 wholesale).

He would sit with his chin lifted, his gaze towards the painted ceiling and his thoughts on the roomful of diners who, he was certain, were speculating on the identity of the urbane, elegantly dressed gentleman seated alone at the centre table.

Marriage to Chloe Barrowes would put an end to his dining at Priam's. Oh well. There might be advantages in not having to go out to eat in all kinds of weather.

The night fog seemed to be increasing as he turned down a side street and proceeded under a canopy into the modest apartment hotel where Chloe occupied three small unventilated furnished rooms.

He nodded a greeting to the shrivelled old woman in the purple dress who attended to the desk and switchboard. Then he pulled open the door of the irritating operate-it-yourself lift, enclosing himself in the small apple-green cage, and pressed the button for the fifth floor. More than once, enduring the snail-like movement of this squeaking vehicle, Macmurray had petulantly

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remarked to Chloe, "When I die, I'll need a coffin bigger than this." But now he thought, I'm not going to die. I'm marrying Chloe instead. It seemed a grim joke.

He moved down the narrow corridor of the fifth floor, greedily sniffing the Sunday-night dinner smells that came from the apartments. One thing about Chloe, she was a superb cook and had learnt to confine her menu to the foods he preferred. Earlier in their friendship she had tried to serve him asparagus, an elaborate fruit salad, or a rhubarb pie—and he had firmly announced, "No, I *never* eat *that*!" Then, too, there were times that he was ready for a third helping of potatoes, and Chloe, flustered, would apologetically explain that she apparently hadn't made enough.

There would be a moment's tension. But Macmurray would smile forgivingly at her over the pecan pie with whipped cream and bestow the ultimate accolade, that her pie surpassed Priam's.

Sometimes he felt a vague, momentary twinge of guilt that he had never taken her to Priam's; but the truth was he didn't want to. He preferred to remain the attractive man in the middle of the room, unconcerned over the many admiring glances directed his way. He refused to lose face by being seen with a woman whose splendour did not equal his own. So he rarely took Chloe out; instead, he came to dinner bearing bread-and-butter gifts carefully chosen from the finest stock at Treasures & Rarities, wrapped in splendid metallic papers and tied with rich satin ribbons and elaborate bows.

Tonight, as Chloe opened the door and admitted him to the warm, spicy-smelling apartment, Macmurray held out a precious-looking golden parcel he had just drawn from his ample coat pocket.

Chloe's brown eyes lighted with pleasure, and her soft voice was gay. "How generous you always are, Macmurray. Let me take your coat, and then I'll open the marvellous package."

She struggled beneath the burden of his coat and hat as she stood on tiptoe to hang them up. Then she returned to the gift which she had placed on the cocktail table in front of the uncomfortable green sofa.

"Macmurray, sit down," she said. With small pretty hands she fumbled with the wrappings and drew forth an ashtray of silver set with lapis lazuli. "Macmurray, how thoughtful, how very sweet of you," she cried.

Macmurray sat down heavily on the sofa, his long legs extending practically into the middle of the old-rose shell-pattern carpeting.

"You've needed ashtrays ever since I've known you," he informed her, "I never could stand the small ones you have."

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Chloe smiled. "Why, I wish you'd said so before. I'd have bought new ones."

"I never could *stand* small accessories, you know."

"I didn't *really* know, Macmurray." She folded the gold paper neatly—he suspected she saved gift paper in a dresser drawer—and placed it under the best-seller that lay on an end table.

"Can you manage a martini?" she asked, moving towards the kitchen, not needing an answer.

Macmurray flicked his cigarette ash into the new ashtray and glanced about the room with the horror that renewed itself at each visit. The faded yellow draperies, the grey plastic venetian blinds which needed washing, the peacock-blue lounge chair of frugal dimensions, the end table shoved into a corner and topped by a small ancient radio whose chief product was static. And of course one couldn't ignore the eight-by-ten watercolour landscape outrageously hideous in its carved frame, that hung slightly crooked over the radiator which could be depended upon to begin a siege of banging about the time Chloe served dessert.

By removing Chloe from this monstrous place, I will be saving her from a fate worse than death, he told himself. And he felt vaguely heroic. He could only hope that she would sufficiently appreciate the splendour of his six-room apartment in the Doorman Building.

The one time he had taken her there for cocktails she had moved silently across the Aubusson rug and fingered the rich fabrics of the furniture and draperies. He had thought with satisfaction, she is as reverent as she would be in church. How right of her.

Now she came from the kitchen carrying a dish of salted nuts, a dish of cheese nibblees, and two martinis on a silver tray (his gift to her two Christmases ago, shortly after they'd met; Treasures & Rarities, $60; $25 wholesale).

She sat down beside him on the sofa, handed him his cocktail, and picked up her own. She rarely touched the hors d'œuvres, for she took great pride in retaining her figure.

As Macmurray reached towards the dish of nuts, Chloe began to tell him what Noreen, the secretary to the boss, had said at lunch yesterday.

Macmurray chewed briskly, nodding occasionally, and thought, How long must I go on hearing about Noreen? For over two years I've been listening to the lives and loves and shopping expeditions and diets and illnesses and philosophies of Noreen and Melba Louise and Sheila and I-don't-know-who-all. Why can't Chloe ever talk about anything that interests *me*?

But, of course, everyone was entitled to a fault, and talking was

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Chloe's. Maybe when she became his wife, her interests would parallel his own. They'd better.

Chloe refilled Macmurray's martini glass and the nut dish from which he had skilfully extracted the almonds, cashews, and pistachios, ignoring the filberts, pecans, and Brazil nuts. She went into the tiny kitchen a second time to check the progress of dinner and emerged after a moment, her forehead beaded with light perspiration.

She sat down, played with the stem of her empty glass—" I'm a one-drink girl," she had once said—and embarked on a subject which had become familiar to Macmurray. She told of her maiden sister Lucy who had been the favoured one in the family during their New England childhood. A plaintive note crept into her voice as she referred to the family rings and brooches and bracelets that Lucy possessed. (" Not that I'm hungry for jewellery," she insisted.) But most of all, Chloe deplored the necessity of setting the table for Macmurray with the indifferent stainless steel she owned, while Lucy, who had no one to entertain, clung to the family silver. She repeated her fear that Lucy's New York apartment—Lucy was a devoted social-service worker —would be burgled and the uninsured silver, which lay in hiding under the bath, would be stolen for sure.

" Oh, it's not fair for her to have everything," Chloe moaned, indulging herself in a single pecan which Macmurray had pushed aside with his thumb.

Macmurray nodded sympathetically, washed down his last helping of almonds and cashews with a giant swallow of martini, and plunged slowly, deliberately into an account of how unfairly life had treated *him*.

He told Chloe—as he had so often before—that he had spent the best-remembered days of his childhood playing with the flowers around the inevitable casket that held the centre of his mother's living-room. His father, his favourite aunt, Cassie, and his brother Malcolm had all died within twenty-one months.

The greatest catastrophe, Macmurray said, was that his mother wished he had died instead of Malcolm. Mother had never said so, and there had never been any real evidence that she wished this; but still, he had *felt* this was Mother's attitude. " And so I was glad Malcolm died," he repeated hotly. " I wanted Mother to myself, and it turned out that I got her."

Mother had been a schoolteacher, and life had been fraught with discipline and deprivation. For example, on birthdays he had not received the gifts he was certain other children received. " Instead, Mother gave me clothes—" he grimaced—" I never really had a real birthday." He swallowed the lump in his throat.

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In a hushed voice Chloe said, " Excuse me while I set the table," and crossed the tiny room to put up the drop-leaf table.

Macmurray managed to consume the last of the almonds, cashews, and pistachios by the time Chloe brought the roast lamb and potatoes to the table and drew up two chairs.

Macmurray ate with slow deliberation, barely hearing a word of her recital which now concerned her married daughter Elissa, who lived in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and worked at the university where her young husband was studying medicine. Chloe said—as she had so often before—that it would have been nice if Lucy had yielded the family silver to Elissa when she married Chuck.

She toyed with the food on her plate for a moment, invited Macmurray to help himself to more. Then she sighed heavily and said, " Oh dear, Christmas in only six weeks."

Macmurray thought: And I guarantee you won't be shopping at Treasures & Rarities. Almost three years ago, Chloe had entered the shop at closing time and browsed about the crystal and silver until all the other customers were gone. Then she had apologised for her slowness and asked his help in selecting a first-anniversary gift for her daughter. They had talked and become friends. Before that time, he had identified her as the prettyish woman who perpetually browsed but never bought; and he had felt a faint wrench at her wistful way of examining precious articles.

Chloe's Christmas problem had nothing to do with Treasures & Rarities. She was wondering aloud—as she had to Macmurray last year and the year before—whether she should give the people at the hotel desk money or a Christmas cake.

" Christmas is *supposed* to be the spirit of the thing," she said. " But I imagine all *they* care about is money, really." She said it was her custom to give five dollars to Francine the maid who came in every other morning to straighten up and five dollars to Joshua, the so-called building engineer, who repaired an occasional leaky tap or carried her bags out to the cab when she went to Ann Arbor for Christmas or east to spend her vacation with Lucy.

But as for the old biddies who sat at the downstairs desk, they were rude in accepting messages and inefficient in dialling outside phone numbers; and besides, there were five of them, and surely one could not be expected to give each of them five dollars.

" Oh, I really don't know what to do," she wailed (as she had last year and the year before).

His mouth full and a perplexed crease on his forehead, Macmurray said, " Chloe, I don't know what to advise."

He knew very well that her request for help was sheer rhetoric.

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She would ultimately drop off a large tin of Christmas cake, gift-wrapped in the splendid papers and ribbons he had provided, and tell whoever was on desk duty, " This is for all of you." Then she would depart in self-congratulatory triumph, Joshua carrying her suitcase out to the taxi.

Macmurray knew also that Chloe would return to town at the end of the holidays, and throughout January she would say to him, " They didn't thank me. No one thanked me. I don't know *why* I worry so about what to give them when they never even remember to thank me."

Macmurray smacked his fork against his plate rather loudly as he ended the meal.

" Delicious," he informed her in a voice of authority. Chloe smiled, and he saw how pretty she must have been; in fact, how very lovely she might still be if she would take the trouble to darken her eyelashes and eyebrows and give her hair a lustrous brown rinse.

Chloe took away the dishes, returned a moment later with the silver coffeepot he had given her last Christmas, and then with two dishes of chocolate whipped-cream pie—a slab for him, a sliver for herself.

Sure enough, the pounding in the radiator was beginning. This always meant that they must raise their voices for after-dinner conversation, making the talk seem unduly effortful.

Chloe poured the coffee, and after he had dropped four lumps of sugar into his cup he decided again that, yes, Chloe did make superior coffee. Perhaps now was the time to tell her—over the banging of the radiator—that she meant a great deal to him; and to hint that a marriage proposal lay in the offing.

" Macmurray, let me get you more pie," she said, and rose from the table.

" Not quite yet, Chloe. I feel rather full. Satisfied, I should say."

" I'm glad, Macmurray." She smiled again.

" Er—Chloe," he began. " I think I'd like you to do—something. I mean: Would you *like* to call me Mac from now on? "

Chloe's smile did not change, but she seemed to be studying him—more calmly than he had hoped.

After a moment she shook her head. " I'd just as soon keep calling you Macmurray. I'm used to it. It's a handsome name. Besides, I *think* of you as Macmurray."

" But we, uh, know each other pretty well. Don't you think Macmurray is a little—formal? "

She considered. " Why, yes, I suppose it is. But then, you're rather formal, rather—distinguished. I'd say Macmurray fits."

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He felt a twinge of impatience. Chloe didn't seem to realise that she of all the people in his world—actually there weren't very many—was being offered a privilege, almost an intimacy; and that in perhaps two weeks, or three, he would—

"You know," she was saying, "even before I knew you, I felt you'd have a name with—well, more than one syllable. Vincent or Warren or Justin or Matthew or Hamilton. You know what I mean? Occasionally, I'd go to dinner with Noreen. We'd go to Priam's, if we wanted to treat ourselves well—isn't it a lovely place?—and I would see you in the centre of the main dining-room."

"But I never saw you," he said in astonishment.

"No. But I saw you. I love to look round at people and study them and guess who they might be, and maybe what sort of lives they lead. You know?" Macmurray nodded. "Well," she said gently, "I saw you several times, maybe half a dozen times or so, sitting at the same table, alone. Always, always alone. I would look at you and feel so sorry for—"

She stopped abruptly, her face turning flame colour. "I mean—" But she could not continue. And, as it happened, the radiator pounding stopped too, and the room was silent.

Macmurray felt his temples begin to burn. Sorry for him! How dare she! She should have known—anybody would—that he dined alone strictly through choice. She should have known that if he wanted he could have had a pretty young girl as a dinner companion. He was not, as she might suppose, a lonely bachelor. If anyone should receive sympathy, it should be Chloe—in this miserable apartment, involved in the trivia of her drab job, her drab Noreen; nights alone reading a best-seller or writing letters to her sister and daughter.

Suddenly he felt a pain in his stomach. He remembered Dr. Gold's warning. He looked at Chloe and saw real tenderness on her face. He felt forgiving; he felt that his decision to marry Chloe was right. Necessary. It would save him, as well as her.

"You know, Chloe," he said with a forced, rather saccharine gentleness, "*you* probably eat alone a great deal, too."

"That's true," she agreed pleasantly.

"And perhaps we are both somewhat—lonely." His voice was tentative.

"Perhaps," she agreed, "although—"

"Well, my idea was that one day we might—the two of us . . ." He stopped, for Chloe's eyes suddenly filled with tears.

He waited while she wiped her eyes with her napkin. Finally she said, "Macmurray, I guess I should have explained some things to you, but I didn't think it would ever be necessary. You

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see, I'm perfectly happy with the way I live. I like my work, and I rather *prefer* being alone as much as I am. Oh, I miss Elissa, and sometimes I get a little bored going out to dinner with Noreen or another one of the girls but really, I like my life."

"You *like* it!" he repeated incredulously.

She nodded. "I had a wonderful marriage. Paul and I were very happy as long as he lived. I miss him, but in a sense I still have Lucy and Elissa." She paused. "There's so much that I can look back on. Like—well—nice little things almost too absurd to mention. For instance—did I ever tell you I was the Spring Dance Queen during my senior year at college? Imagine—me winning such a contest. Can you imagine it?"

"Why, of course," Macmurray lied.

Her face glowed with the light of recollection, and she was about to mention other young and wonderful memories. Instead she said, "But let me get you some more pie."

Macmurray cleared his throat and murmured that he must leave, that he had some gift catalogues he wanted to leaf through before he went to bed. And though he could see Chloe did not believe him, she nodded and smiled and went for his coat and hat.

Fifteen minutes later, walking through the fog, he paused in front of a shop trying to resist; then he went in and bought four pint containers—they had no quarts—of chocolate ice-cream.

He went home, took a warm bath with some spicy imported bath oil, and told himself over and over that Chloe didn't deserve a man of his taste and calibre. He felt better.

He got into his silk pyjamas and warm maroon cashmere dressing-gown and went into the kitchen. He switched on the small, expensive radio on the work table, then from the freezer took the first pint of ice-cream and placed it, one large mound of chocolate, in an antique red-and-gold Venetian bowl. He took a spoon and sat down at the kitchen table and dug into the ice-cream.

The nasal voice of a late-night disc jockey was saying, "That song was from Sally and Veronica and Geraldine, for Richard on his birthday. And now . . ."

Macmurray plunged his spoon back into the chocolate, thinking somewhere in the back of his mind, Isn't it ridiculous? I am a grown man who is going to die because night after night I eat chocolate ice-cream to celebrate the birthday party I never really had.

"It isn't fair," he said aloud, indistinctly because his mouth was full of ice-cream.

A tear rolled down the side of his nose.

"Happy birthday, Mac," he said.

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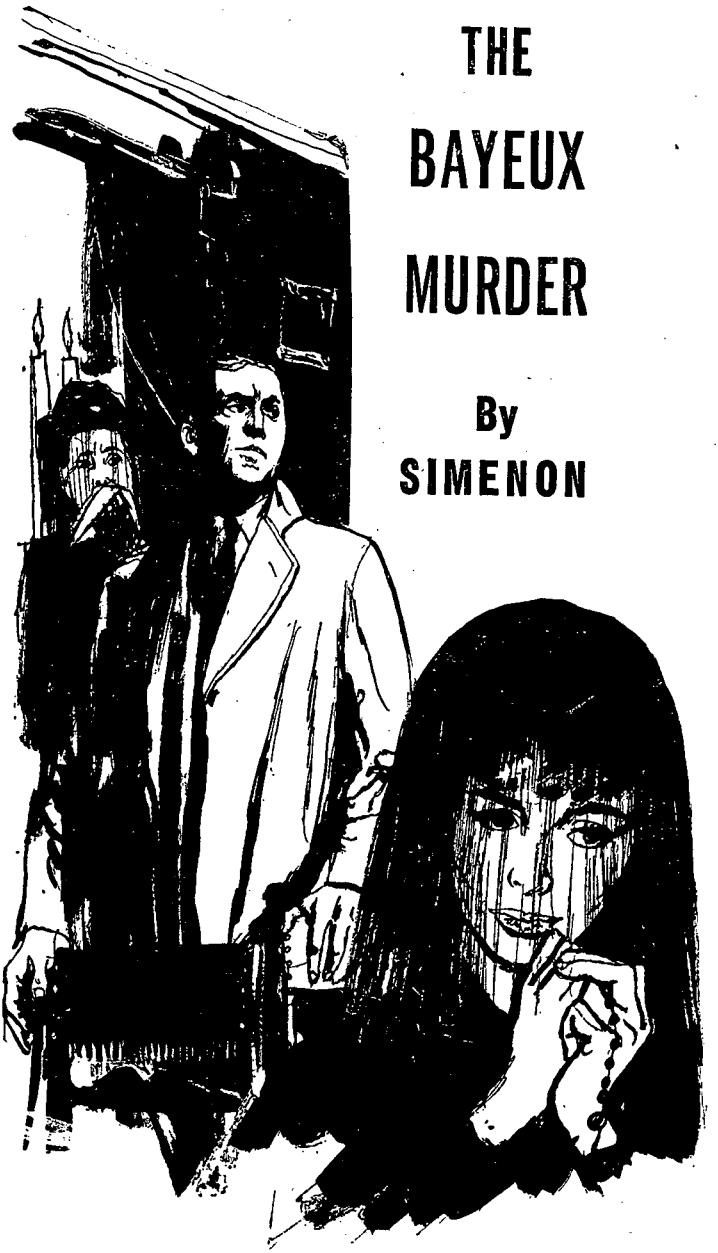

THE BAYEUX MURDER

By SIMENON

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DRAMATIC NEW MAIGRET

Unbeatable, irresistible, he's everybody's favourite detective. Even the French police follow and approve his exploits. They've presented Simenon with a small medal which he carries on his key ring, token of their appreciation of increased goodwill between people and police since the advent of his master creation.

For years before the public generally acclaimed him, Somerset Maugham, Priestley, and Thornton Wilder hailed Simenon as one of the all-time "greats." Now a new edition of one of his books is published somewhere in the world every two days—the phenomenon of the book trade.

SIT down, mademoiselle." Maigret sighed as he regretfully set aside his pipe.

And he again looked at the prosecutor's note and read: *A family matter. Please hear what Cécile Ledru has to say; but observe the utmost discretion in acting on it.*

This was at Caen, in the period when Maigret had been sent down there to reorganise the district constabulary. He could not get used to this grasping, secretive Norman province; he felt hampered, confined, and missed the freedom of action he had enjoyed in Paris.

This note, for instance: *A family matter . . . the utmost discretion . . .* Did this mean that he was once more going to run up against the family of some high official or important person in the district? It was incredible how many provincial big guns had cousins and brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law who had to be handled gently by the police!

"I'm listening, Mademoiselle Ledru."

She was something to look at, this Mademoiselle Cécile, almost too goodlooking—an effect heightened by the mourning that poetically emphasised her naturally pale complexion.

"Your age?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Profession?"

"I suppose it would be best to explain everything to you, so that you can understand my position. I was an orphan, and I started out in life, at the age of fifteen, as a maid of all work. I was still wearing pigtails, and I didn't know how to read or write."

Maigret suppressed his astonishment. This was an amazing beginning for one who now possessed so marked an air of distinction.

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"Please go on."

"I happened to secure employment with Madame Croizier, at Bayeux. You've heard of her?"

"I confess I haven't." These provincials! Always assuming that the whole world knows their local characters!

"I'll tell you more about her later. She became very fond of me. She induced me to study and make something of myself. Then she kept me with her, no longer as a servant, but as a companion. She asked me to call her Aunt Joséphine."

"So you live in Bayeux with Madame Joséphine Croizier?"

The girl's eyes clouded over with tears. "That's all over now," she said, drying her eyes with a handkerchief. "Aunt Joséphine died yesterday, here in Caen. That's why I came to see you. To tell you about the murder and—"

"Just a moment! You're sure that Madame Croizier was murdered?"

"I swear it."

"You were there?"

"No."

"Someone told you?"

"My aunt herself!"

"I beg your pardon? Your aunt *told* you that she had been murdered?"

"Please, Inspector! I am not suffering from delusions; I know very well what I'm saying. My aunt has told me time and again that if anything should happen to her in the house on rue des Récollets, my first duty should be to demand an investigation into—"

"Just a moment. What is this 'house on rue des Récollets'?"

"The home of her nephew, Philippe Deligeard. Aunt Joséphine had come to Caen for several weeks to have her teeth attended to. At sixty-eight, she was having trouble with them for the first time. She was staying with her nephew, and I had remained at Bayeux because Philippe doesn't care for me at all."

On a scrap of paper Maigret jotted down, *Philippe Deligeard.*

"How old is this nephew?"

"Forty-four or five."

"Profession?"

"He has none. He had a fortune—his wife's—but I believe that for several years that fortune has been only a memory. Nevertheless, he still keeps up a large house on rue des Récollets, with cook, butler, and chauffeur. Philippe often came to Bayeux to beg his aunt to lend him money."

"And did she?"

"Never! She used to tell her nephew he had only to be patient and wait for her death."

As the young woman talked on, Maigret mentally arranged one of his habitual résumés:

First of all, there lived in Bayeux, in one of those quiet streets near the cathedral where the sound of a footstep makes the curtains

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tremble in every window, a Madame Joséphine Croizier, widow of Justin Croizier.

Now the story of her fortune was at once macabre and droll. Croizier, a mere law clerk when he married, was a monomaniac on the subject of insurance. His hobby was to spend his time signing policies with every possible company, to the scornful amusement of all concerned.

For the first and last time in his life he took the boat to Southampton. It was a rough crossing. A lurch of the ship hurled him against a bulkhead and cracked his skull open; his widow, shortly thereafter, was astonished to receive a million francs from divers insurance companies.

From that time on Joséphine Croizier's only amusements, in her gloomy house in Bayeux, were to look after this constantly growing fortune and to spend whole afternoons chatting with her protégée, Cécile Ledru. She succeeded so well in the first of these occupations that she was rumoured to be worth four or five million francs.

Her sister's son, Philippe Deligeard, had started off elegantly by marrying the daughter of a rich dealer in horses. He had furnished a magnificent mansion, renowned as one of the showplaces of Caen. But his investments had proved as unfortunate as his aunt's had been lucky; and it was rumoured that he had been living for three or four years on credit, borrowing money at high interest against his future inheritance from his aunt.

"In short, Mademoiselle Cécile, the only serious basis for your accusation is that Philippe needed money badly, and his aunt's death provides him with it?"

"I already told you that Madame Croizier herself always said that if she should die on rue des Récollets—"

"Pardon me, but you must know how much the fears of old ladies are worth as evidence. Now, about the actual facts of the case?"

"My aunt died yesterday, around five in the afternoon. They're trying to claim that she had a heart attack!"

"Did she have heart trouble?"

"Nothing to die of."

"Were you in Bayeux at this time?"

It seemed to Maigret, though it might have been a misleading impression, that the young lady showed a certain hesitation in answering.

"No . . . I was here in Caen."

"I thought that you had not accompanied Joséphine Croizier on this trip?"

"That's right. But by bus it's only half an hour from Bayeux to Caen. I came in to do a little shopping."

"And you didn't try to see your aunt, as you call her?"

"I called at the house on rue des Récollets."

"At what time?"

"Around four. They told me that Madame Croizier had gone out."

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"Who told you that?"

"The butler."

"After asking his employers?"

"No. On his own."

"Then we must believe either that it was true, or that he'd been given his instructions beforehand."

"That's what I thought."

"Then where did you go?"

"Down town. I had a lot of little things to do. Then I went back to Bayeux, and this morning, when I read the Caen paper, I learnt of my aunt's death."

"Curious . . ."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I say it's curious. At four in the afternoon, when you call at rue des Récollets, you're told that your aunt is out. You go back to Bayeux, and the next morning you learn in the paper that your aunt died only a few minutes, an hour at most, after your visit. Is it correct that you've requested a police investigation, Mademoiselle Cécile?"

"Yes, Inspector. I haven't any fortune, but I'd gladly give the little I have to discover the truth and punish the guilty."

"Just a moment. Speaking of the state of your finances, may I ask if you stand to inherit from Joséphine Croizier?"

"I'm certain that I won't. I myself drew up her will, and I positively refused to accept anything whatsoever. Otherwise no one would have believed how truly disinterested my affection has been, during the years I have devoted to my benefactress."

She was almost too good to be true. Seek as he would, Maigret could not find the chink in her armour. "So you're left without a penny?"

"I didn't say that, Inspector. I received a salary as Madame Croizier's companion. Since I had no expenses, I was able to put away a nice little nest egg that will see me through for a while—though I'm willing to spend every sou of it to avenge my aunt."

"May I ask one more question? Philippe is the heir, isn't he? Now supposing it's proved he killed his aunt—then he won't be allowed to inherit. What will become of the millions?"

"They will go to institutions for the protection of young girls."

"Madame Croizier was interested in that sort of charity?"

"She felt a pity for young girls who live alone; she knew the dangers that surround them."

"She was very straitlaced?"

Cécile hesitated a moment, thinking it over. "Very much so."

"A trifle fanatical on the subject?"

"Almost."

"Thank you, mademoiselle."

"You are going to make an investigation, aren't you?"

"I'll check up on the situation, and if it seems necessary . . . By the way, where can I find you?"

"My aunt's body is lying in the house on rue des Récollets

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Until the funeral—that will be two days from now, here in Caen—I'll be there with her most of the time."

"In spite of Philippe?"

"We don't speak to each other, and I don't so much as set foot in the rest of the house. I pray and I cry a little . . . At night, I'm staying at the Hotel Saint Georges."

Maigret finished his pipe while his eyes studied intently the enormous grey house, the carriage gate with its copper ring, the ornate entrance court with its bronze candelabra.

It was almost twenty-four hours since the girl's visit. It had taken Maigret that long to clear up enough of the details of his reorganisation to allow him to take charge of the investigation in person; any other inspector in Caen, he feared, might take the prosecutor's request for discretion too seriously. And discretion and all, he felt in his bones that this was going to be his kind of case—even though he had a sinking feeling that it would be what he called a No-Pipe Case—an investigation conducted in scenes of such respectability that the inspector could not decently keep his hay burner in his mouth.

That was why he stole a few last puffs before going in, watching the people who came and went: ladies in black, gentlemen formally garbed—all of the haute bourgeoisie of Caen, in short, come to pay their respects.

"This'll be a cheerful party!" he sighed as he finally tapped his pipe against his heel. And he went in like the rest, passed by the silver tray full of visiting cards, reached the end of a blue-and-white tiled hall, and beheld, beyond a large door draped with black, the coffin—surrounded by flowers, by candles, by black silhouettes, standing and kneeling.

The odour of burning wax and chrysanthemums was in itself enough to establish the atmosphere. Then the whisperings, the handkerchiefs dabbing at the mourning nostrils, that great air of dignity that people assume only before justice and death . . .

Cécile Ledru was there in a corner, kneeling on a prie-dieu, her face covered by a black veil transparent enough to reveal her composed features, and the movement of her lips as the beads of a jade rosary slipped through her fingers.

A man clad all in black, his eyes reddened, his features distorted, kept watching Maigret as though wondering what right he had there. The inspector went up to him. "Monsieur Philippe Deligeard? I'm Inspector Maigret. If you could let me see you alone for a moment . . ."

Maigret had the impression that the man cast a nasty look at the girl before leaving the black-draped room. "Come with me, monsieur. My office is on the next floor."

A marble staircase with a beautiful iron railing. On the wall of the landing a genuine Aubusson tapestry. Then an enormous office, with Empire furnishings, with three windows that opened on a park larger than seemed possible here in the midst of the city.

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" Please sit down. I imagine that girl is still continuing her machinations and that I owe the pleasure of this visit to her? "

" You refer to Mademoiselle Cécile Ledru? "

" I do indeed refer to that conspirator from belowstairs who contrived, for a brief space of time, to exert an undue and unfortunate influence upon my aunt. A cigar? "

" No, thank you. You say ' for a brief space of time.' Should I take it that this influence didn't last? "

Maigret had no need to study Philippe Deligeard closely. Elegantly dressed even in his mourning, he was the perfect type to be found in every provincial city: the rich bourgeois, keeping up an impressive establishment, insisting above all on decorum, on the precise cut of clothes, the telling details of speech and manner that distinguished him from the common run of mortals.

" You understand, Inspector, how extremely painful, not to say disagreeable, it is to me to receive, in such sorrowful moments, the visit of a policeman. Nevertheless, I shall answer your questions. I want this affair to be cleared up, and I want to see Cécile receive the punishment she so well deserves."

" Which is . . . ? "

" As your previous question proves, you understand that my aunt was not ultimately deceived by the hypocritical manners of that girl or by her supposedly disinterested devotion. As evidence I may adduce the fact that when my aunt came to spend a month with us here, we suggested that she might bring her companion with her; the house is large enough. And she flatly refused, telling us in confidence that she had had enough of the girl and was looking for a way to get rid of her. All that she feared was that, if she broke off the relationship too brutally, Cécile might try to seek some revenge."

Maigret could not help it. It was the general atmosphere that forced him to murmur, with an irony his host overlooked, " How wicked and deceitful people are! "

" Sooner or later, therefore, my aunt would have made a clean break with this creature, who had even tried to cause trouble between my aunt and me."

" She did? "

" Claiming, among other things, that I had mistresses. Now as man to man, Inspector, you'll admit that at my age and in my situation it's natural to . . . oh, discreetly, of course, like any man of the world . . . But of course my poor aunt, with her fixation on purity, couldn't understand that. You can't talk with old people about this sort of thing."

" Cécile told her? "

" How else could my aunt have learnt it? But it was an unwise move; that treacherous girl saw her own manœuvre rebound against her. When my aunt learnt that her chaste companion was receiving, under her very roof, secret visits from a young man of whom the least that can be said is that his family is not of the best . . ."

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"Cécile had a lover?" If Maigret's indignation was not actual it was admirably played. And he took advantage of it to slip his pipe from his pocket with the most innocent air, as though he had completely forgotten the sumptuous décor that surrounded him and the Havana cigars awaiting him on the desk.

"For the last two years! It's two years now that they've been meeting almost every night. His name is Jacques Mercier. He and a friend have some sort of transport business. And it's worth observing that his parents went through the bankruptcy court several years ago."

"Would you believe it! And you told this to your aunt?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't I? Wasn't it my duty?"

"Naturally."

"That was when my aunt finally made up her mind to get rid of Cécile. But the fear of some attempt at revenge still made her hesitate. That's why I suggested to my aunt that she should henceforth stay with us. I would have placed the entire second floor of our home at her disposal."

"And when were these questions discussed?"

"Why . . . the day before yesterday . . ."

"And a decision was reached?"

"Not formally. But the principle was established."

"Nevertheless, I don't imagine that you'd accuse Cécile of having murdered your aunt?"

Philippe lifted his head abruptly and looked at Maigret with utter astonishment. "But there's no question of murder! That girl must be as insane as she is vicious if she's been telling you such absurd fantasies. My aunt died of a heart attack. The medical examiner expressly stated as much in his certificate."

"In short, you do not accuse Cécile of the murder of your aunt?"

"I certainly would if I were not sure that my aunt had died a natural death. As it is, however, if this girl continues to spread such stories about us, I shall be forced to bring a suit against her for slander."

"One question, Monsieur Deligeard: your aunt died around five o'clock, didn't she?"

"A few minutes after five, yes. Or so my wife tells me; I was not here myself."

"All right. Now, around four o'clock, Joséphine Croizier was not in this house?"

"Every day at four she had an appointment with her dentist. She was having several bridges fitted—a long and difficult job."

"Do you know what time your aunt came back to the house?"

"Around five, they tell me. It was almost immediately after her return that she had the attack; she died before anyone could do anything for her."

"The attack happened in her bedroom?"

"Yes. The Louis XIV room on the second floor."

"Your wife was up there with her?"

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" She went up as soon as my aunt opened her door and called for help."

" May I ask where you were?"

" I imagine, Inspector, that these questions are not part of a formal investigation? That, I warn you, I will not tolerate."

" Of course not. This is just so we can prove to that nuisance of a girl that there's nothing to investigate."

" Ah . . . certainly . . . I must have been at my club. I generally leave here around four-thirty or quarter to five, and walk through the city to get a little exercise. Around five I settle down to bridge, and at seven-thirty the car comes to bring me home for dinner."

" You received the news by telephone at your club? "

" Exactly."

" And when you got home . . .? "

" My aunt was dead and the doctor was already here."

" Your family doctor? "

" No; he lives too far away. My wife called a doctor in the neighbourhood, but it was too late for him to do anything."

" The servants? "

" Arsène, the chauffeur, had the day off. The butler is on duty on the main floor all afternoon. The cook must, I imagine, have been in the kitchen. Now is there anything more that you would like to know, Inspector? I owe a duty to those who have come to offer me their condolences, and I am expecting at any moment the presiding judge, who is also president of my club. I think the best thing that you can do is to give that girl a good warning. If she continues to spread these vile stories, I'll have a warrant out against her."

Philippe Deligeard must have wondered what could have caused, in so solemn a moment, the odd smile on Maigret's lips. The inspector had, for some moments, been staring at the mirror over the fireplace, which reflected a curtained doorway. The curtain had moved several times, and once the inspector had glimpsed a pale face that could belong only to Madame Deligeard. He could not help speculating whether she had overheard her husband's man-to-man exposition of the life of a man of the world.

" Good day, Inspector. I dare hope that after these explanations I have taken the trouble to make, my mourning will no longer be disturbed by this stupid and indecent fiction. The butler will show you out."

Philippe rang, nodded curtly to the policeman, and moved off with dignified strides towards the curtained doorway.

A quarter of an hour later Maigret sat in the office of the Prosecutor for the Republic—a placid and ironic Maigret, regretfully fingering his pipe in his pocket; for the Caen prosecutor was not a man to allow smoking in his office.

" Well, Inspector? You heard the girl's story? "

" I also visited the scene of the death."

" What's your opinion? A lot of nonsense, isn't it? "

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"On the contrary, I have the feeling that this poor old lady Joséphine Croizier was assisted on her way out of this world. But by whom? That's the question . . . And there's one other question: do you really want to find out?"

The Hotel Saint Georges was one of those little residential hotels that exist in every city—the hotels you never hear of unless someone sends you there, the hotels whose tenants are old people, priests, fanatically devout girls, in short everyone remotely connected with pious devotion, from beadles to candle manufacturers.

The lobby was furnished with rattan chairs. Maigret had been waiting there a good half hour. An old lady looked up from her embroidery from time to time to cast a glance of suspicious severity at the inspector, as the smoke of his pipe drifted up to form a bluish halo around the chandelier.

"You, my fine fellow, are waiting for the same person as I am," Maigret had wagered as soon as he saw a young man pacing up and down the lobby and consulting his watch at one-minute intervals.

Now, after a half-hour wait, the two men had come to know each other without exchanging a word. As the young man surveyed Maigret from head to foot, his thoughts were selfevident: So this is the famous inspector Cécile was talking about! He looks harmless enough . . . plump, goodnatured . . . But there must be some news, since he's looked up Cécile at the hotel.

And for his part Maigret was thinking, Not bad, this young Jacques Mercier! Quite a boy, in fact—maybe a little too much so. Not at all the proper young provincial. Looks as if he might have ideas of his own. Good features, wavy hair, bright eyes, fire in his veins . . . Aha, Mademoiselle Cécile! It looks to me as if you liked contrasts, and as if your prudence might be a bit less pronounced at night.

When she came in, she first saw Jacques Mercier, and a smile lit up her face. But the young man pointed to the inspector, and she came up to him, frowning.

"You want to talk to me?" she asked. She did not seem pleased to meet Maigret in her lover's presence.

"I'd like to straighten out a few small matters. But this doesn't seem to me to be quite the right place. This hotel's so quiet you can hear the moths buzzing. Wouldn't you like to go out to a café for a moment?"

Cécile looked at Mercier. He nodded, and a little later the three of them were sitting in a bar, with a billiard game going on next to them.

"First of all, let me point out, Mademoiselle Cécile, that it wasn't very nice of you not to mention Monsieur Mercier to me."

"I felt he had nothing to do with the case, but I should have known Philippe would tell you all about him. What else did he say about me?"

"Very nasty things, as you might guess. I believe he's what they call a perfect man of the world, but he has a very sharp

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tongue. One beer, waiter! What are you drinking, mademoiselle? Port? You too? Two ports."

Maigret relaxed on the moleskin banquette, his eyes mechanically following the billiard balls. As he smoked in little voluptuous puffs, he seemed to be savouring the grey, pervasive peace of provincial life.

"So this has been going on for two years?"

"It's two years since we met, if that's what you mean."

"And how long has it been since Monsieur Mercier fell into the habit of spending his nights in the old lady's house?"

"Over a year."

"It never occurred to you to get married?"

"The old lady, as you call her, would never have allowed it. Or rather, she would have regarded it as an act of treason against her. She was jealous of my affection. There was nobody else in her life but nephews whom she loathed; so she looked on me as the one thing belonging to her. It was for her sake that I concealed my relationship with Jacques, so as not to hurt her feelings."

She answered Maigret's questions docilely enough, while her companion occasionally raised his eyebrows, as though to suggest a trifle more discretion.

"Your turn, Monsieur Mercier."

"I don't see how I'm involved in—"

"Nobody's trying to involve you. Mademoiselle Cécile has asked the police to do a job, and you can help by answering questions. Philippe Deligeard asserts that your business isn't doing well. Is that true?"

"Well . . ."

"Is it true?"

"Answer him, Jacques!"

"It's true enough. I went into business with a friend, and we bought three used lorries to transport fish from the little ports on the Channel. Unfortunately, the lorries turned out to be in pretty bad shape, and what with all the repairs and—"

"When's it due?"

"When's what due?"

"Your going out of business?"

"The lorries haven't run for three days now, because the garage rent isn't paid."

"Thank you. Now, mademoiselle, would you tell me again what time you reached rue des Récollets?"

"Day before yesterday? Around four . . . wasn't it, Jacques?"

"I beg your pardon; you were with her?"

"I brought her in my car and waited at the corner. It must have been five past four."

"You drove her from Bayeux?" Maigret looked severely at Cécile, who had told him that she came by bus. "All right. Now tell me, mademoiselle: when you learnt of Joséphine Croizier's death from the paper, I imagine you asked Mercier to drive you back to Caen. What time did you reach rue des Récollets?"

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" Around nine-thirty in the morning."

" Then the old lady had been dead for a whole night. Will you tell me precisely what you saw? "

" What do you mean? First I saw the butler, then some men in the great hall, then Philippe Deligeard, who came up to me and sneered, ' I thought you'd come running! ' Then I saw my aunt—"

" One moment. This is the part that interests me. You saw your aunt's body. Where? "

" In the coffin."

" So it was already in the coffin, but the lid hadn't been closed yet? "

" They closed it a little later. I saw them. The men I'd met in the hall were from the undertakers."

" So you recognised your aunt's face? You're certain of that? "

" Absolutely! What on earth are you thinking of? "

" You didn't notice anything abnormal? "

" Of course not. I was crying . . . I was very upset . . . I should have liked to be alone with her a little, but that wasn't possible . . ."

" One last question: I know the main entrance to the house on rue des Récollets. But I imagine there must be another? "

" There's a little door at the rear, on rue de l'Echaudé. That's more of an alley than a street; there aren't any houses facing on it, just garden walls."

" If you go in by this door, can you get into the upper part of the house without going near the butler or the cook? "

" Yes. You take what they call the staircase; it leads to the second floor."

" How much do I owe you, waiter? Thank you, mademoiselle. And you too, Monsieur Mercier." Maigret paid the bill and rose, more cheerful than the circumstances seemed to indicate.

A few minutes later, his pipe still in his mouth, he had entered Deligeard's club and made his way into the secretary's office. There he asked a number of questions and jotted down the answers detailedly in his notebook, with an ever-growing air of satisfaction.

" Now let me read this summary back to you. You say that you're certain you saw Philippe Deligeard arrive the day before yesterday at five-fifteen . . . that's right? His three usual partners were waiting for him to make up a four for the game of bridge that regularly started at five. He took his place at the table. As soon as the cards were dealt he was called to the telephone. When he left the booth, he'd turned very pale, and announced that his aunt had just died at his home . . . That's all; you can't think of anything more to add? Thank you. Good day, monsieur."

And Maigret shrugged his shoulders as he crossed through the solemn rooms where sad old men, sunk into the depths of their armchairs, dozed behind the screens of their newspapers.

Dr. Liévin, the local doctor who had been called in too late, was a very young man with bright red hair. He wore a white coat and

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was at the moment engaged in broiling a chop over the gas stove in his consulting room.

"Am I disturbing you, Doctor? You'll forgive me, but I need a few details concerning the death of Madame Croizier."

Liévin was a bare twenty-seven. He had just begun to practice in Caen; and, to judge from his surgery, he was not yet overburdened with patients.

"I suppose, first of all, that you are the nearest doctor to the Deligeards' house?"

"Almost. I think I have a colleague on rue des Minimes."

"Had you had any previous occasion to be called in by Monsieur Deligeard?"

"Never. As you realised when you came in, I've just begun my practice here and I haven't many patients. It was quite a surprise to me to be called in to one of the finest homes in the city."

"What time was it? Can you fix the time exactly?"

"With the most rigorous precision." Liévin smiled. "I have a little nurse who comes in every afternoon for my consultation hours; she leaves at five o'clock. She had just put on her hat and I was in the very act of kissing her when the phone rang."

"So it was five exactly. How long did it take you to reach rue des Récollets?"

"Seven or eight minutes."

"The butler let you in and took you up to the second floor?"

"No, not exactly. The butler opened the door, but all at once a woman leaned over the staircase and called down, 'Come quickly, Doctor!' It was Madame Deligeard, and she herself showed me into the bedroom on the right—"

"Just a minute. The bedroom on the right . . . that would be a room with light blue hangings?"

"You're mistaken, Inspector. The room on the right is papered, not hung. Wallpaper with yellow circles."

"Louis XIV furniture?"

"Pardon me. I know a little about periods, and I can state positively that the room on the right is Regency."

To the doctor's astonishment Maigret wrote all these apparently insignificant details down in his notebook. "All right. You're upstairs and it's about five-ten. Where's the body?"

"On the bed, of course."

"Undressed?"

"Naturally."

"I beg your pardon. This was at five-ten, and Joséphine Croizier was undressed. What was she wearing?"

"A nightdress and a dressing-gown."

"Outer clothing lying around?"

"I don't think so . . . No; everything neat and in order."

"And no one there but Madame Deligeard?"

"Yes. She was extremely nervous. She described her aunt's attack; I realised that death must have been practically instantaneous. Nevertheless, I examined the dead woman and found that

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she had been in a greatly weakened condition; this must have been at least her tenth attack."

"Could you determine approximately the time of death?"

"That's automatic . . . Within a minute or two, I'd place the death at four-fifteen."

The doctor recoiled in astonishment as Maigret leapt up and seized him by the shoulders. "What? Four-fifteen?"

"Why, yes. Madame Deligeard made no secret of the fact that she'd tried to get hold of two other doctors before falling back on me. That takes some time—"

"Four-fifteen!" Maigret repeated, rubbing his brow. "I don't want to offend you, Doctor, but . . . you're new at the game . . . Are you positive of what you're saying? Would you persist in this statement if a man's life were at stake?"

"I could only repeat—"

"All right. I believe you. But I ought to warn you that you'll almost certainly have to repeat this statement in court, and the lawyers'll do everything they can to break your testimony."

"They won't succeed."

"Have you anything else to tell me? What happened next?"

"Nothing. I signed the death certificate. Madame Deligeard insisted on paying me on the spot and gave me two hundred francs."

"Is that your usual fee?"

"Hardly. It was her idea; I didn't argue. She went with me halfway downstairs. The butler opened the door for me."

"And you didn't meet anyone else?"

"Not a soul."

Through the windows of the little house Maigret could see the family at dinner. "It can't be helped," he muttered, as he interrupted the domestic scene by pressing the doorbell.

The medical examiner was a little old man, half deaf, still holding his napkin in his hand. He led Maigret into an office reeking of cabbage soup and ringing with the clatter of knives and forks from the dining-room.

"Did you know Monsieur and Madame Deligeard before you were called in to certify their aunt's death officially?"

"I've vaguely noticed Monsieur Deligeard around town. After all, he's a prominent man. But we didn't move in the same circles."

"When did you go to the house?"

"The city hall notified me around six-thirty. I reached rue des Récollets before seven."

"You knew Madame Croizier?"

"No. The butler asked me to wait while he announced me to his master. Then Monsieur Deligeard took me up to the second floor and into a room done all in yellow—"

"You're sure it was a yellow room?"

"Absolutely. It struck me because my daughter wants a yellow room and my wife insists it isn't the right thing. I found that the old lady had died of a heart attack and I filled in the usual forms."

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"She was undressed?"

"In her nightclothes."

"No disorder in the room?"

"I didn't notice any."

"Did you meet anyone?"

"Not a soul. Why?"

"Finally, have you any idea of the time of death?"

"I wasn't paying much attention . . . Between four and five, I'm sure."

"Thank you."

The smell of the soup had roused the inspector's appetite. He went to a restaurant noted for its Normandy sole and its tripe à la mode de Caen. Even the restaurant, like all the other scenes Maigret had visited that day, had something dusty and solemn about it—a sort of deliberate austerity.

Yet this was the sort of case that Maigret liked best: a dignified facade, venerable and decorous characters, every indication of virtue exaggerated to the point of boredom. And then it was up to Maigret to tear down that facade, to sniff around in the ruins and nose out at last the human beast, the most unforgivable of evils, the killer for profit.

He was taking it easy on this case. There was a certain malicious pleasure in proceeding slowly, in playing cat-and-mouse with the murderer . . .

The prosecutor had repeated, "Do what you must, but be discreet! A slip could cost you dear . . . and me, too. Philippe Deligeard is a wellknown man about town; he may have his debts, but he's received everywhere. And as for the girl—Cécile, as you call her—if you lay a hand on her, you'll have the press championing her as the victim of the capitalists. The watchword, Inspector, is discretion!"

And Maigret had murmured to himself disrespectfully, "All right, old lady! But nobody's going to get away with anything."

The tripe was tasty, and Maigret left the table in a state of bliss heightened by his inability to refuse the proprietor's calvados.

"Pretty soon I'll have it all straightened out," he promised himself. "And now, an interview with that butler . . ."

The Deligeards' butler answered his ring and began to show him into the waiting-room.

"No, my friend, it's you I want to talk to. You know who I am, don't you? What were you doing when I rang?"

"Coffee was being served in the kitchen."

"Then I'll have my coffee in there with you."

There was nothing for the butler to do in the face of this self-invitation but to lead Maigret to the kitchen and announce to the cook and the chauffeur, "The inspector would like a cup of coffee."

Arsène, the chauffeur, wore a very elegant grey uniform, now unbuttoned for kitchen informality. The cook was a very fat woman.

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" Don't disturb yourselves on my account, friends. I could have called you down to headquarters, but it wasn't worth bothering you for such trifles. Don't button up, Arsène! Be comfortable . . . By the way, how did you happen to have the day off the day before yesterday? Was it your regular day? "

" Not exactly. That morning the boss said out of a clear sky that I couldn't have my day off next week on account of a trip to the south, so I'd better take it then."

" Monsieur Philippe drove himself, then? "

" Yes. I didn't think he'd be needing the car, but I noticed he'd used it."

" How could you tell? "

" There were mud spots inside."

" It wasn't raining, so he must have gone to the country? "

" Well, around here, you see, the country starts right near the house. A few hundred yards and you're off the paved roads."

Maigret turned to the butler. " And where were you during the afternoon? "

" In the pantry, which is near the entrance hall. The day before yesterday I was polishing the silver."

" Can you tell me what time Madame Croizier went out? "

" A few minutes before four, the same as every day. Her appointment with the dentist was at four, and he's only a stone's throw away from here."

" She looked well? "

" She always did. She was a very well-preserved woman—very cheerful, not at all proud. She never went by without a word for us."

" Did she say anything in particular to you this time? "

" No. She just called out, ' See you later, Victor.' "

" She walked to the dentist's? "

" Madame Croizier did not care for cars. Even when she went home to Bayeux, she always preferred to take the train."

" Could you tell me where the car was at that time? "

" No, monsieur."

" It wasn't in the garage? "

" No, monsieur. Monsieur and Madame went out in it immediately after lunch. They came back about an hour later, but they must have left the car outside. I should tell you it's never parked in this street—it's too narrow—but round the corner, where I can't see it when I open the door."

" So Monsieur and Madame, as you say, came back around three. One hour later, a little before four, Madame Joséphine Croizier went out. Then? "

" Mademoiselle Cécile called."

" At what time? "

" Four-ten. I told her that her aunt had left, and she went away."

" She didn't see anyone except you? "

" No one."

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"And then?"

"Monsieur went out. It was four twenty-five. I noticed the time, because it was a little early for him."

"He wasn't carrying anything?"

"Not a thing."

"He was behaving normally?"

"I think so."

"Go on."

"I'd just begun on the knives . . . Yes . . . that was all that happened then. And it was almost five when Madame Croizier came back."

"Still looking fine?"

"And in very good humour. She said to me as she went by that it's all wrong to talk about dentists as people who hurt you."

"She went up to her room?"

"Yes."

"Hers is the Louis XIV room?"

"Indeed it is."

"The yellow room, on the right?"

"Oh no! That's the Regency room. That's hardly ever used."

"What happened next?"

"I don't know . . . Several minutes went by. Then Madame came down, all excited—"

"Just a moment. How many minutes went by?"

"About twenty. At any rate, it was well after five when Madame asked me to call Monsieur at his club and tell him his aunt had had an attack."

"So you phoned him and told him?"

"Yes."

"That's all you said?"

"It's all I knew."

"Then you went upstairs?"

"No, none of us went upstairs. A young doctor came and Madame took him up . . . It wasn't until seven that we were officially informed of Madame Croizier's death, and not till eight that we all saw her—"

"In the yellow room?"

"No! In the blue room."

A bell rang. Victor groaned, "It's Monsieur. He wants tea." And Maigret turned slowly towards the door.

When he was through at the house on rue des Récollets, Maigret found his way to the offices of Caen's leading daily newspaper, where he bought a copy of the previous day's paper.

Over a glass of beer in a pavement café he studied the paper carefully, with particular attention to the obituary column, in which Mademoiselle Cécile had learnt the news of her aunt's death.

Over a second beer he meditated. Suddenly he said aloud, "Discretion!" Then he rose, paid his bill, flagged a taxi, and rode to the outskirts of town, where the paved streets end . . .

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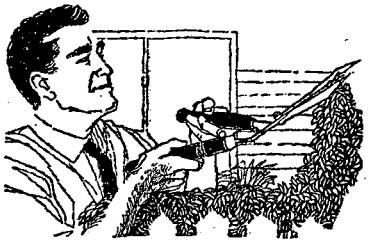

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" The prosecutor asks you to wait."

Maigret waited. The bench was hard and the hallway was dusty in the Caen courthouse.

It was ten in the morning. A policeman had showed up early at his pension—a poor substitute for Madame Maigret and the apartment in Paris—with a terse summons from the prosecutor requesting Maigret's presence at the office at ten sharp.

At ten minutes past ten he rose from his bench and approached the attendant. " Is there someone in the prosecutor's office? "

" Yes. He's been in there since nine-thirty. It's Monsieur Deligeard."

An odd smile drifted across Maigret's lips. Each time he passed before a certain padded door, he heard a murmur of voices. And each time the same smile crossed his lips again.

It was after ten-thirty when a bell summoned the attendant, who returned to announce, " The prosecutor will see you now."

And Philippe Deligeard had not yet left. Maigret thrust his hot pipe in his pocket and went in with a slow ponderousness that was at least half assumed. It often struck Maigret's fancy, especially when he was in a particularly good humour, to assume a delibérate air of stupidity—at which times he seemed clumsy, bumbling, and even fatter than usual.

" My respects to the prosecutor. A very good day to you, Monsieur Deligeard."

" Close the door, Inspector. You place me in an extremely delicate and disagreeable situation. What did I recommend to you yesterday? "

" Discretion, Monsieur Prosecutor."

" Did I not also tell you that I placed no reliance on the fables of that girl, that Cécile? "

" And you told me that Monsieur Deligeard was an important man in Caen and we had to be very careful how we handled things where he was involved." Maigret smiled blandly, looking out of the corner of his eye at Philippe.

In full mourning Monsieur Deligeard seemed even more solemn than the prosecutor. He affected an air of complete disinterest, not even turning towards the inspector.

The prosecutor glared ferociously at the inspector, as if he suspected the irony that lay behind this oafish affability. He seemed to have some trouble controlling his anger as he ordered, " Sit down! I detest people who pace about! "

" Gladly, Monsieur Prosecutor."

" Where were you at nine o'clock last night? "

" At nine? Let me think . . . Why, I must have been at Monsieur Deligeard's."

" Without his knowledge! Behind his back! You were there under false pretences; no search warrant had been issued to you! "

" I had a few questions to ask his servants."

" That is exactly why Monsieur Deligeard has come here to

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bring charges against you. Those charges, I am forced to admit, are completely justified. You have overstepped your rights. If you needed to question the servants, you should have notified their employer of the fact; that is elementary. You understand me?"

"Certainly, Monsieur Prosecutor." And Maigret maliciously lowered his eyes like a petty civil servant caught in an error.

"That is not all! What follows is far more serious—so serious that I cannot yet foresee all the repercussions your actions will provoke in high places. After you had complaisantly listened to, solicited, and I may even say provoked malicious gossip from the servants, you left the house; but it was not long before you re-entered by another door. I suppose you do not deny this?"

Maigret sighed humbly.

"What key did you use to open the garden door? Was it perchance Cécile Ledru who lent it to you? I advise you to weigh carefully the consequences of your answer."

"I didn't have a key to the little door. I really wasn't even planning to go into the garden. I just wanted to know how they brought in the body . . ."

"What's that?" Both the prosecutor and Philippe rose abruptly, one as pale as the other.

"I'll tell you all about that in a minute, if you want me to. But about the door: I saw that it had a childishly simple lock. Any honest passkey ought to be able to open it. I wanted to make sure, so I tried it. It was a dark night. The garden was deserted. I noticed that it wasn't far to the garage. Now, I didn't want to disturb Monsieur Deligeard for such a trifle, especially in his sorrow, so I just went over to look at the mud spots Arsène was talking about."

The prosecutor frowned. Philippe, his gloves in his hand, started to speak, but Maigret left him no opportunity.

"That's all . . . I know I shouldn't have done it. I ask your pardon and I'll try to justify myself as best I can."

"You confess to a violation of the code! You, a police inspector—"

"I can't say how sorry I am, Monsieur Prosecutor. If I hadn't been so careful not to disturb Monsieur Deligeard—I knew he'd just had his tea sent up—I might have asked him some questions—"

"That will do! I may add that I do not care for this tone of mockery you seem to feel you have the right to assume. I am forwarding today, to the Ministry of Police, Monsieur Deligeard's charges against you. I believe we may now, until further notice, consider this incident closed, Monsieur Deligeard. I trust that I have given you every possible satisfaction."

"Thank you, my dear Prosecutor. This man's conduct has been an outrage. I assure you that it is only my regard for the reputation of the police that restrains me from taking even stronger measures."

The prosecutor received Monsieur Deligeard's hand with cordial warmth and hastened to show him to the door.

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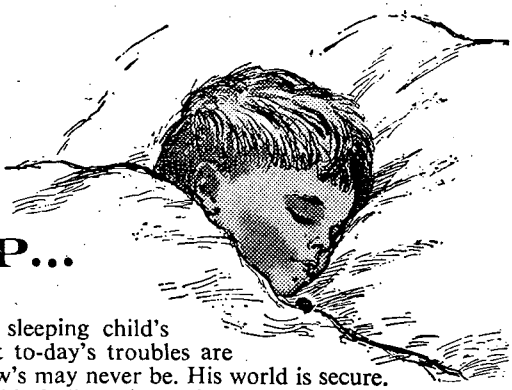

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"Again, thank you. I'll be seeing you soon, I trust?"

"I'll be at the funeral tomorrow, Monsieur Deligeard, and I hope—"

Suddenly they heard Maigret's voice peacefully observing, "Monsieur Prosecutor for the Republic, I should like, if you'd allow, to ask this man one question. Just one."

The prosecutor frowned. Deligeard, already on the threshold, paused automatically, and Maigret murmured, "Could you tell me, monsieur, if you will go to Caroline's funeral?"

The prosecutor was astonished at the effect of these words. In one instant Philippe's face seemed to fall apart.

Still placid, too placid, Maigret closed the door.

"You can see that we aren't really through yet. I beg your pardon for detaining you, but I'm only afraid it won't be for long enough."

"Inspector—" the prosecutor began.

"Don't be afraid. This Caroline doesn't mean that I'm planning, as the papers say, to unveil the secrets of his private life. She isn't a kept woman or a working girl seduced by Monsieur Deligeard. It's all perfectly respectable; she's his old nurse . . ."

"I must ask you to explain . . ."

"As lucidly as I can without wasting your time and without showing you where it all happened . . . I'll begin, if you wish, with The Mystery of the Yellow Room, which must surely bring back pleasant memories of your boyhood reading. And this yellow room was the basis of all my discoveries; or rather, it confirmed my suspicions and allowed me to proceed— Stop looking at the door, Monsieur Deligeard! It's no use."

"I am waiting," the prosecutor sighed, playing with a letter opener.

"You must know that on the second floor of the house on rue des Récollets, Madame Joséphine Croizier occupied the bedroom on the left, called the Louis XIV room, which had pale blue hangings. Now, at a few minutes to five, Joséphine Croizier entered the house in the best of health, exchanged a pleasantry or two with the butler, and went up to her room. Which is to say, the blue room.

"Now when Dr. Liévin answered the telephone summons at five-ten, he was shown into the bedroom on the right, the Regency room, which is furnished in a lovely yellow. And in this room the poor old lady lay, already undressed and in her nightclothes, without even a trace of the disorder that follows a hasty undressing. What is your opinion?

"Go on!" the prosecutor said dryly.

"Nor was this the only mystery involved. Here's another: young Dr. Liévin, who has only just come to the district and who treats poor people for a ten-franc consultation fee, is summoned to the elegant mansion of the Deligeards in preference to any other practitioner. He finds that the death took place at around four-fifteen. Who's lying? The doctor, or the butler who saw

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Madame Croizier come in a little before five? And if it's the butler, the dentist must be lying too; he states that at four-fifteen the old lady of Bayeux was in his surgery."

"I don't understand . . ."

"Patience! I didn't understand it either, at first. Any more than I understood why Monsieur Deligeard, who left his house earlier than usual that day, did not reach his club until five-fifteen."

"Sometimes a man walks faster or slower . . ." This defence came from the prosecutor; Deligeard, his face drained of colour, sat motionless.

"Then answer this question, Monsieur Prosecutor. Monsieur Philippe had hardly reached the club when his butler phoned him that his aunt had had an attack. That was all the butler said, because it was as much as he knew. Then Monsieur Deligeard went back to the card-room, shocked, and announced that his aunt had just died."

The prosecutor cast an unpleasant look at Philippe, who sat motionless.

"Now for the secondary questions. Why, on that particular day, had Monsieur Deligeard given his chauffeur the day off on the pretext of a coming trip? Coincidence? All right. Why does he take the car out at two in the afternoon, and then leave it outside? Where do he and his wife go between two and three?"

"To the bedside of a sick woman!" Philippe suddenly answered.

"To the bedside—exactly—of Caroline, of Caroline who lives on the outskirts of town, which accounts for the mud. And I can prove that that mud comes from in front of the lime kiln opposite Caroline's house."

As if mechanically, Maigret had begun to load his pipe and pace up and down the office.

"We are confronted, my dear Prosecutor, with one of the basest, meanest crimes I have ever encountered—at the same time almost a perfect crime—a crime based on the assumption that there cannot possibly be more than a token investigation into a superficially plausible death of a leading citizen of a provincial town.

"Philippe Deligeard has never done a blessed thing in his life but marry a rich wife, live on a grand scale, and speculate with so little judgment that he lost her entire fortune. For three years he's been in desperate straits; and his only resource is his aunt, who refuses to help him.

"It's obvious. It's simple!

"Monsieur Deligeard will not contradict me when I say that there were days, despite the grand life he led, when there wasn't a hundred francs of ready money in the house.

"You can't learn a profession or a trade at his age. You can't change your way of living overnight.

"The aunt is old. In spite of that disquieting girl Cécile Ledru, she won't disinherit her nephew—especially since my fine Cécile doesn't approve of it. But just to make sure, Philippe drops a hint

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to the old lady that the girl is somewhat less pure than the driven snow . . .

" You're following me, Monsieur Prosecutor? You might say that the murder is already decided upon, out of sheer necessity: Joséphine Croizier has to die if the Deligeards are to go on living according to their tastes.

" On the other hand, if it's easy enough to push someone over the borderline between life and death, it's a tough job to hide the cause of death from the doctors. Particularly in a case of inheritance, and above all in the provinces, poison is risky; it's the first thing the gossips will think of, and everybody knows that the Deligeards are penniless. Shooting's impossible . . . a knife leaves traces . . .

" As I say, the murder is already decided upon. All that's lacking is opportunity—the opportunity to do away with the old lady with no risks.

" And then, all of a sudden, there's the opportunity.

" Philippe has an old nurse, Caroline, just about Madame Croizier's age, who lives alone in a house just outside town and who has no relatives. She's had several heart attacks. Now the Deligeards get word that she's had another. They go to see her at two in the afternoon, and come back an hour later knowing that Caroline hasn't two hours to live.

" The arrangement of the house favours their plans, but still they're careful to overlook no detail.

" Madame Deligeard leaves at once by the back door, walks to Caroline's—it isn't far—and holds her bedside vigil until the old nurse dies around four-fifteen.

" Philippe does not leave the house until his usual hour—a little earlier because of his impatience. He finds his car round the corner, drives to Caroline's, loads the body in the car, and brings his wife back with him.

" The two of them, still using the back door, bring the body into the house and set it up in the yellow room on the second floor.

" As far as the servants know, Madame Deligeard has not left the house; her husband is on his way to the club.

" They are in the house, waiting for the aunt to return. She must come soon . . . She does, she enters her bedroom—the blue room—and is killed on the spot.

" All that is left is for Philippe to go to his club—by the back door, in his car—to create an alibi. He is to drive back in the car later, explaining his prompt return probably by saying that he took a taxi.

" The doctor is carefully chosen because he knows neither the house nor Joséphine Croizier. Madame shows him Caroline's body; he quite correctly diagnoses natural death and signs the certificate. The same business later with the medical examiner.

" Take the nurse's body back to her house late that night, and the job's done."

There was a silence. The prosecutor studied his letter opener as he asked, " What made you think of Caroline? "

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"Logic! The two doctors could not possibly have examined the body of Joséphine Croizier. So I bought the next day's paper. I read the list of deaths. I was certain I'd find at least one old lady. I found her, I investigated, and when I learnt her connection with the Deligeards, the case was as good as over. Her neighbours will testify to various comings and goings by car that day; they didn't think anything about it because they knew the old lady's former employers often came to see her. Possibly the one thing in his life that's to Philippe Deligeard's credit."

The silence was heavy. Then, with a sudden rap of the letter opener, the prosecutor asked hesitantly, "Do you confess, Philippe Deligeard?"

"I will answer only in the presence of my attorney."

The traditional formula . . . His face was bloodless. He faltered and stumbled as he tried to get up. Maigret had to bring him a glass of water.

The autopsy on Joséphine Croizier revealed that her heart was in excellent condition, and that she had been clumsily killed, first by attempted strangulation with a corset lace, then, doubtless because she was still struggling, by two knife wounds.

"I am compelled to congratulate you, Inspector," the prosecutor admitted with a glacial smile. "You are indeed the star performer that you are said to be. Nevertheless, I must confess to you that your methods, in a small city, are perilous."

"Which means I won't last long at Caen?"

"It is indeed true that—"

"Thanks."

"But—"

"I haven't been too happy here myself. My wife's waiting for me in Paris. All I hope is that your Caen jury won't be so impressed by the luxurious mansion of that blackguard Philippe that they'll forget to ask for the death penalty."

La Vieille Dame de Bayeux © Georges Simenon

Translated by Anthony Boucher

GERALD KERSH
JOHN STEINBECK
BERKELY MATHER
BRIAN CLEEVE
IN **argosy** NEXT MONTH

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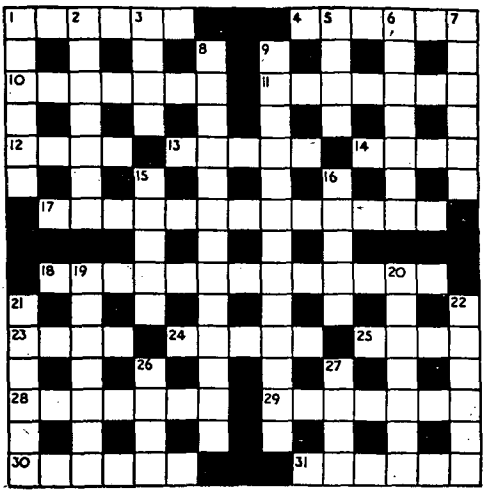
Solution on page 100



ACROSS

1 Get hep—or get lost ! (4, 2).

4 Fish—pound short of heavy weight (6).

10 Queen in loco—locus (7).

11 Out of this world ? (2, 5).

12 Cheese made in reverse (4).

13 Haunts of mere monsters (5).

14 Burden is on ourselves (4).

17 Pronouncement of starchy old judge ? (5, 8).

18 Time, for a neat Scotch perhaps ? (5, 8).

23 Bacchanalia (4).

24 Playing this gives you the hump (5).

25 Mr. Knightley's girl (4).

28 French flat water is tableland (7).

29 Novice—but he finally makes money ! (7).

30 Ancient trees (6).

31 Supplies (6).

DOWN

1 Mixed herb to worry about (6).

2 B.A. rates on the same level (7).

3 Vain, confused—terrible, in fact (4).

5 A German by English river (4).

6 Bent coin ends the plague (7).

7 The French examination is most recent ! (6).

8 Unconscious P.I. is passed unnoticed (13).

9 Linesman's gear ? (7-6).

15 Inflamed — with anger mainly (5).

16 Charles II was (5).

19 Careworn novelist (7).

20 Alma can reverse the calendar (7).

21 Link up two (6).

22 Half-crazy city ? (6).

26 Rent or varied rate (4).

27 A sailor—of the earth ? (4).

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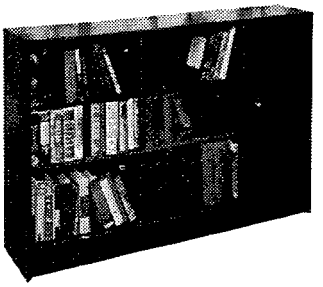

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